

# *Theological-Political Treatise*

*SEVERAL DISCUSSIONS  
SHOWING THAT THE REPUBLIC CAN GRANT  
FREEDOM OF PHILOSOPHIZING  
WITHOUT HARMING ITS PEACE OR PIETY,  
AND CANNOT DENY IT  
WITHOUT DESTROYING ITS PEACE AND PIETY*

By this we know that we remain in God and that God  
remains in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

1 John 4:13<sup>1</sup>

Hamburg  
Henry Künracht<sup>2</sup>  
1670

## *Preface*

[1] If men could manage all their affairs by a definite plan, or if fortune were always favorable to them, no one would be in the grip of superstition. But often they are in such a tight spot that they cannot decide  
5 on any plan. Then they usually vacillate wretchedly between hope and fear, desiring immoderately the uncertain goods of fortune, and ready

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1. Spinoza will cite this passage again in xiii, 22; xiv, 17; and Letter 76. The preceding verse reads: “No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us.” He will call attention to this context in xiii, 11. See also the discussion of “the spirit of God” in i, 25–40. Spinoza normally quotes the New Testament from the translation by Immanuel Tremellius (c. 1510–1580), an Italian Jewish convert to Christianity who translated the Bible into Latin from Hebrew and Syriac. In the sixteenth century some New Testament scholars believed that the Syriac version of the New Testament was older than the Greek texts on which Jerome had based his translation. See Austin 2007, 126–29. Spinoza thinks the Syriac text may be the original and not a translation. See ADN. XXVI at xi, 3, and Gebhardt V, 1.

2. Both the publisher and the place of publication are fictitious. In fact, the TTP was published in Amsterdam by Jan Rieuwertsz.

to believe anything whatever. While the mind is in doubt, it's easily driven this way or that<sup>3</sup>—and all the more easily when, shaken by hope and fear, it comes to a standstill. At other times, it's over-confident, boastful and presumptuous.

- 10 [2] Everyone, I think, knows this, though most people, I believe, do not know themselves. For no one who has lived among men has failed to see that when they are prospering, even if they are quite inexperienced, they are generally so full of their own wisdom that they think themselves wronged if anyone wants to give them advice—whereas in  
15 adversity they don't know where to turn,<sup>4</sup> and beg advice from every-  
one. They hear no advice so foolish, so absurd or groundless, that they do not follow it. Now they hope for better things; now they fear worse, all for the slightest reasons. [3] If, while fear makes them turn  
20 this way and that, they see something happen which reminds them of some past good or evil, they think it portends either a fortunate or an unfortunate outcome; they call it a favorable or unfavorable omen, even  
though it may deceive them a hundred times. Again, if, in amazement, they witness something strange, they believe it to be a portent which indicates the anger of the gods or of the supreme divinity. Subject to  
superstition and contrary to religion, they consider it a sacrilege not to avert the disaster by sacrifices and prayers.<sup>5</sup> In this way they invent  
countless things and interpret nature in amazing ways, as if the whole  
of nature were as crazy as they are.
- 25 [4] Because this is so, we see that the men most thoroughly enslaved to every kind of superstition are those who immoderately desire uncertain things, and that they all invoke divine aid with prayers and unmanly tears, especially when they are in danger and cannot help themselves. Because reason cannot show a certain way to the hollow  
30 things they desire, they call it blind, and human wisdom vain. The delusions of the imagination, on the other hand, dreams and childish follies, they believe to be divine answers. Indeed, they believe God rejects the wise, and writes his decrees, not in the mind, but in the

3. Leopold 1902 noted many allusions in Spinoza's writings to the plays of Terence, which Van den Enden used as a means of teaching his students Latin (Meisma 1983, ch. 5). Here the allusion is to *Andria* 266. For an analysis of the rhetorical structure of the Preface, see Akkerman 1985.

4. Here the allusion is to Terence's *Heautontimorumenos* 946. The theme recurs in the *Ethics*: III P17S, III P50S, and Def. Aff. 1Exp. (ALM).

5. Spinoza's language recalls Tacitus' description of the Jews' response to prodigies before the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. (*Histories* V, xiii). Tacitus criticizes the Jews for *not* performing appropriate religious rituals, because of a superstitious belief that it would be impious to do so (ALM). Jer. 10:2 instructs the Jews not to follow the heathen in being dismayed at signs in the heavens.

entrails of animals; they think fools, madmen and birds predict his decrees by divine inspiration and prompting. That's how crazy fear makes men.<sup>6</sup>

[III/6] [5] The reason, then, why superstition arises, lasts, and increases, is fear.<sup>7</sup> If anyone wants particular examples of this, beyond those already mentioned, let him consider Alexander, who began to use seers from genuine superstition<sup>8</sup> only when he first learned to fear fortune at the  
5 Susidan Gates.<sup>9</sup> But after he defeated Darius, he stopped consulting soothsayers and seers until an unfavorable turn of events<sup>10</sup> once again terrified him. Because the Bactrians had defected, the Scythians were threatening battle, and he himself was rendered inactive by a wound,

... he lapsed again into superstition, that mocker of men's minds, and ordered Aristander, to whom he had surrendered his credulity, to inquire  
10 into the outcome of things through sacrifices.<sup>11</sup>

[6] We could give a great many examples like this which would show most clearly that men are tormented by superstition only so long as they are afraid; that all the things they have ever worshipped in illusory religion have been nothing but apparitions, the delusions of a sad and fearful mind; and finally, that it is when states have been in the greatest  
15 difficulties, that seers have had the greatest control over ordinary people, and been most dangerous<sup>12</sup> to their Kings. But I think everyone knows these things well enough; so I'll say no more about them.

6. Spinoza's rhetoric here—*Tantum timor homines insanire facit*—echoes a famous line in Lucretius I, 101: *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*, how great the evils religion could persuade men to (ALM).

7. Cf. Hobbes' analysis of the natural causes of religion in *Leviathan* xii, 1–11. Hobbes acknowledges no substantive difference between religion and superstition (cf. *Leviathan* vi, 36 with xi, 26). For the origins in Epicurean thought, see Strauss 1965, ch. 1.

8. The phrase *superstitio animi* comes from Quintus Curtius V, iv, 1. I believe the intended contrast is between a superstitious belief sincerely held and the manipulative use of the people's superstitious beliefs, by leaders who do not share them. Cf. Quintus Curtius IV, x, 1–8, cited below at III/6/30. ALM note that Curtius acquired a reputation as a “libertine” historian because of his skepticism concerning prodigies. Next to Tacitus, Curtius is the ancient historian Spinoza cites most frequently (Gebhardt V, 7).

9. \*See Quintus Curtius V, iv, [1].\* “Susidan Gates” was the name the Persians gave to a mountain pass through which Alexander tried to march with his army, suffering his first serious defeat. See Quintus Curtius V, iii, 16–23.

10. *temporis iniquitate*, an allusion to Quintus Curtius VII, vii, 6.

11. \*As Curtius himself says, Bk. VII, §7.\* (LCL reads *ludibrium* where Spinoza has *ludibria*.) The influence of fortune, both good and bad, on Alexander's character is a major theme in Curtius, who attributes Alexander's virtues to his nature, and his vices either to his fortune or to his youth. Cf. X, v, 26–36. Among the vices: his aspiration to divine honors and his trust in oracles.

12. *maximeque formidolosos*, alluding to Tacitus, *Agricola* 39 (ALM). That the power of kings is often precarious will be an important theme in the *Political Treatise*. Cf. TP vii, 14, 20.

[7] Some say that superstition arises from the fact that all mortals have a certain confused idea of divinity.<sup>13</sup> My account of the cause of superstition clearly entails, first, that all men by nature are subject to superstition; second, that like all mockeries of the mind and impulses of frenzy, it is necessarily very fluctuating and inconstant; and finally, that it is protected only by hope, hate, anger, and deception, because it arises, not from reason, but only from the most powerful affects.

[8] As easy, then, as it is to take men in with any superstition whatever, it's still just as difficult to make them persist in one and the same superstition. The common people always remain equally wretched, so they are never satisfied for long. What pleases them most is what is new, and has not yet deceived them. This inconstancy has been the cause of many uprisings and bloody wars. As is evident from what we have just said, and as Curtius aptly noted, "Nothing governs the multitude more effectively than superstition" (Quintus Curtius, IV, x, 7). That's why they are easily led, under the pretext of religion, now to worship their Kings as Gods, now to curse and loathe them as the common plague of the human race.

[9] To avoid this evil [of inconstancy], immense zeal is brought to bear to embellish religion—whether the religion is true or illusory—with ceremony and pomp, so that it will be thought to have greater weight than any other influence, and so that everyone will always worship it with the utmost deference. The Turks have succeeded so well at this that they consider it a sacrilege even to debate religion; they fill everyone's judgment with so many prejudices that they leave no room in the mind for sound reason, nor even for doubting.<sup>14</sup>

[10] The greatest secret of monarchic rule,<sup>15</sup> and its main interest, is to keep men deceived, and to cloak in the specious name of Religion the fear by which they must be checked, so that they will fight for slavery as they would for their survival,<sup>16</sup> and will think it not shameful, but a most honorable achievement, to give their life and blood that one

13. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* I, iii–iv. Calvin cites Cicero's *De natura deorum* I, xvi, 43, in support of his claim that God has implanted in all men some understanding of divinity. But he thinks most actual religious practice—both pagan and Roman Catholic—is a superstitious corruption of this knowledge, arising from either ignorance or malice.

14. Cf. Spinoza's comments on Islam in Letter 76, at IV/322/7–12. Pufendorf wrote in a letter to Thomasius that Spinoza owned a copy of the Quran which he had bound with the New Testament, suggesting a certain equivalence between these works in his mind. See Freudenthal/Walther 2006.

15. The expression Spinoza uses here, *regiminis Monarchici . . . arcanum*, echoes a phrase in Tacitus, *arcana imperii* (e.g., in *Annales* II, 36), as noted by ALM, 698. This language was also used in the title of a book by Clapmarius which Spinoza possessed. Gebhardt V, 4, reproduces Clapmarius's definition.

16. *salus*. RT has *vrijheid*, *freedom*, a possible translation of *salus*.

10 man may have a ground for boasting.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, in a free republic nothing more unfortunate can be thought of or attempted. For it is completely contrary to the general freedom to fill the free judgment of each man with prejudices, or to restrain it in any way.

[11] As for the rebellions which people stir up under the pretext of  
15 religion, they surely arise only because laws are made about speculative matters, opinions are considered crimes and condemned as wicked, and their defenders and followers are sacrificed, not to the public well-being, but only to the hatred and cruelty of their opponents.<sup>18</sup> But if, by the legislation of the state, only *deeds were condemned and words went unpunished*,<sup>19</sup> such rebellions could not be clothed in any pretext  
20 of right, nor controversies turned into rebellions.

[12] Since, then, we happen to have that rare good fortune<sup>20</sup>—that we live in a Republic in which everyone is granted complete freedom of judgment, and is permitted to worship God according to his mentality, and in which nothing is thought to be dearer or sweeter than freedom—I believed I would be doing something neither unwelcome, nor useless,  
25 if I showed not only that this freedom can be granted without harm to piety and the peace of the Republic, but also that it cannot be abolished unless piety and the Peace of the Republic are abolished with it.

[13] That's the main thing I resolved to demonstrate in this treatise. To do this it was necessary to indicate the main prejudices regarding religion, i.e., the traces of our ancient bondage, and then also the  
30 prejudices regarding the right of the supreme 'powers'.<sup>21</sup> Many, with the most shameless license, are eager to take away the greater part of

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17. An allusion to Quintus Curtius IV, x, 3 (ALM).

18. ALM suggest an allusion to Tacitus, *Annals* XV, xlv, which attributes the persecution of the Christians under Nero to Nero's cruelty rather than to any concern for the public good.

19. An allusion to Tacitus, *Annals* I, lxxii, where the issue is Tiberius' revival of the law of treason, which had originally applied to official misconduct damaging to the state (such as betrayal of an army), but came to be applied to speech critical of the emperor (ALM).

20. *Rara foelicitas*. An allusion to a passage in Tacitus (*Histories* I, i, 4: "in that rare good fortune of the times when it is permitted to think what you like and to say what you think"), which Spinoza will refer to again in §32, in the title of Ch. xx, and in xx, 46. Hume used the same line from Tacitus as the motto for his *Treatise*, a work from which he excised his own treatment of miracles in the hope of winning the approval of Bishop Butler. See Mossner 1980, 112.

In Letter 14 Oldenburg had made a similar claim about the freedom of the Dutch Republic. That Spinoza's praise of the Republic is ironic seems clear from Letter 30, explaining his reasons for writing the TTP, from the fact that he felt obliged to conceal his own identity and that of his publisher on his title page, and from §17 of this Preface. Cf. also the comments on xx, 40, and Israel 1995, 675–76, 789–90. I've discussed these matters in Curley 2015c.

21. On the meaning of the single quote mark before "powers" see the Glossary entry: POWER, 'POWER.

that right, and under the pretext of religion to turn the heart of the multitude (who are still at the mercy of pagan superstition) away from the supreme 'powers, so that everything may collapse again into slavery.<sup>22</sup> I'll indicate briefly in what order I show these things; but first I must [III/8] say what reasons have impelled me to write.

[14] I've often wondered that men who boast that they profess the Christian religion—i.e., love, gladness, peace, restraint, and good faith toward all—would contend so unfairly against one another, and indulge daily in the bitterest hatred toward one another, so that each man's faith is known more easily from his hatred and contentiousness than from his  
5 love, gladness, etc. Long ago things reached the point where you can hardly know what anyone is, whether Christian, Turk, Jew, or Pagan, except by the external dress and adornment of his body, or because he frequents this or that Place of Worship, or because he's attached to this or that opinion, or because he's accustomed to swear by the words of some master.<sup>23</sup> They all lead the same kind of life.

10 [15] What's the cause of this evil? Doubtless that religion has commonly consisted in regarding the ministries of the Church as positions conferring status, its offices as sources of income, and its clergy as deserving the highest honor. For as soon as this abuse began in the Church, the worst men immediately acquired a great desire to administer the sacred offices; the love of propagating divine religion degenerated  
15 into sordid greed and ambition; and the temple itself became a Theater, where one hears, not learned ecclesiastics, but orators, each possessed by a longing, not to teach the people, but to carry them away with admiration for himself, to censure publicly those who disagree, and to teach only those new and unfamiliar doctrines which the common  
20 people most wonder at. This had to lead to great dissension, envy, and hatred, whose violence no passage of time could lessen.

[16] It's no wonder, then, that nothing has remained of the old Religion but its external ceremony, by which the common people seem more to flatter God than to worship him. No wonder faith is nothing now but credulity and prejudices. And what prejudices! They turn  
25 men from rational beings into beasts, since they completely prevent everyone from freely using his judgment and from distinguishing the true from the false, and seem deliberately designed to put out the light of the intellect entirely. [17] Piety—Oh immortal God!—and Religion consist in absurd mysteries, and those who disdain reason completely,  
30 and reject and shun the intellect as corrupt by nature—this is what's

22. An allusion to Tacitus, *Annals* i, 7, repeated at TP vii, 2 (ALM).

23. An allusion to Horace's *Epistles* I, 1, v. 14 (ALM). Cf. xii, 7.

most unfair—they are the ones who are thought to have the divine light.<sup>24</sup> Of course, if they had even the least spark of divine light, they would not rave so proudly, but would learn to worship God more wisely, and would surpass others in love, not, as now, in hate. If they really feared for the salvation of those who disagree with them, and not for their own position, they would not persecute them in a hostile

[III/9] spirit, but pity them.

[18] Moreover, if they had any Divine light, it would at least be manifest from their teaching. I grant that they could never have wondered sufficiently at the most profound mysteries of Scripture. But I don't see that they have taught anything but Aristotelian and Platonic speculations. Not to seem to constantly follow Pagans, they have accom-

5 modated Scripture to these speculations.<sup>25</sup> [19] It wasn't enough for them to be insane with the Greeks, they wanted the Prophets to rave with them. This clearly shows, of course, that they don't see the divinity of Scripture, not even in a dream. The more extravagantly they wonder at these mysteries, the more they show that they don't so much believe Scripture as give lip service to it.

10 This is also evident from the fact that most of them presuppose, as a foundation for understanding Scripture and unearthing its true meaning, that it is everywhere true and divine. So what we ought to establish by understanding Scripture, and subjecting it to a strict examination, and what we would be far better taught by Scripture itself, which needs no human inventions, they maintain at the outset as a rule for the

15 interpretation of Scripture.<sup>26</sup>

[20] When I weighed these matters in my mind—when I considered that the natural light is not only disdained, but condemned by many as a source of impiety, that human inventions are treated as divine teachings, that credulity is valued as faith, that the controversies of the Philosophers are debated with the utmost passion in the Church and in the State, and that in consequence the most savage hatreds and

20 disagreements arise, by which men are easily turned to rebellions—when

24. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* II, ii, 18–21. Cf. below §23 and xv, 10.

25. Cf. below, i, 19; xiii, 5; and Curley 2002.

26. Cf. Manasseh 1842/1972, I, ix: “The Bible being in the highest degree true, it cannot contain any text really contradictory of another.” Calvin also seems committed to the consistency of Scripture, taking “the beautiful agreement of all the parts with one another” to provide confirmation of the divine origin of its doctrine, from which its truth and consistency would seem to follow. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, I, viii, 1. See also his references to the prophets as taking ‘dictation’ from the Holy Spirit (e.g., in *Institutes* IV, viii, 6) and to the apostles as “sure and genuine scribes of the Holy Spirit” (*Institutes* IV, viii, 9). But Calvin’s position on this issue is a matter of dispute among those who study him. See McNeill 1959, and Dowey 1994.

I considered these and a great many other things, which it would take too long to tell here, I resolved earnestly to examine Scripture afresh, with an unprejudiced and free spirit, to affirm nothing about it, and to admit nothing as its teaching, which it did not very clearly teach me.<sup>27</sup>

- 25 [21] With this precaution I constructed a Method of interpreting the Sacred books, and equipped with this, I began by asking, first of all [in Ch. 1]: what was Prophecy? and in what way did God reveal himself to the Prophets? why were these men accepted by God? was it because they had lofty thoughts about God and nature, or only because of their piety? Once I knew the answers to these questions, I  
30 was easily able to determine [in Ch. 2, III/42/26ff.] that the authority of the Prophets has weight only in those matters which bear on the practice of life and on true virtue, but that their opinions<sup>28</sup> are of little concern to us.

[22] Knowing this, I next asked [in Ch. 3] why the Hebrews were called God's chosen people? When I saw that this was only because God had chosen a certain land for them, where they could live securely and  
[III/10] comfortably, from that I learned that the Laws God revealed to Moses were nothing but the legislation of the particular state of the Hebrews, and that no one else was obliged to accept them, indeed that even the Hebrews were bound by them only so long as their state lasted.

- [23] Next, to know whether Scripture implies that the human intellect  
5 is corrupt by nature, I wanted to ask [in Chs. 4 and 5] whether universal Religion, *or* the divine law revealed to the whole human race through the Prophets and Apostles, was anything other than what the natural light also teaches? [and in Ch. 6] whether miracles happen contrary to the order of nature? and whether they teach God's existence and providence any more certainly and clearly than do things we understand  
10 clearly and distinctly through their first causes?

- [24] But since I found nothing in what Scripture expressly teaches which did not agree with the intellect, or which would contradict it, and moreover, since I saw that the Prophets taught only very simple things, which everyone could easily perceive, and that they embellished these things in that style, and confirmed them with those reasons, by  
15 which they could most readily move the mind of the multitude to devotion toward God, I was fully persuaded that Scripture leaves reason absolutely free, and that it has nothing in common with Philosophy, but that each rests on its own foundation.

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27. The project, then, is fundamentally an extension of Cartesian method into an area where Descartes himself had not dared to tread. I've discussed this in Curley 1994.

28. That is, their speculations about God and nature. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan* viii, 26.



[25] To demonstrate these things conclusively,<sup>29</sup> and to settle the whole matter, I show [in Ch. 7] how Scripture is to be interpreted, and  
 20 that our whole knowledge of it and of spiritual matters must be sought from Scripture alone, and not from those things we know by the natural light. From this I pass to showing [in Chs. 8–11] what prejudices have arisen from the fact that the common people, enslaved to superstition and loving the remnants of time more than eternity itself, worship the books of Scripture rather than the Word of God itself.

25 [26] After this, I show [Chs. 12 and 13] that the revealed Word of God is not some certain number of books, but a simple concept of the divine mind revealed to the Prophets: to obey God wholeheartedly, by practicing justice and loving-kindness. And I show that this is what Scripture teaches, according to the power of understanding and opinions of those to whom the Prophets and Apostles were accustomed to preach this Word of God. They did this so that men would embrace  
 30 the Word of God without any conflict and with their whole heart.

[27] Having shown the fundamentals of faith [in Ch. 14], I conclude finally that revealed knowledge has no object but obedience, and indeed that it is entirely distinct from natural knowledge, both in its object and in its foundation and means. Revealed knowledge has nothing in common with natural knowledge, but each is in charge of its own  
 [III/11] domain, without any conflict with the other. [In Chapter 15 I show that] neither ought to be the handmaid of the other.<sup>30</sup>

[28] Next, because men vary greatly in their mentality, because one is content with these opinions, another with those, and because what moves one person to religion moves another to laughter, from these considerations, together with what has been said above, I conclude that  
 5 each person must be allowed freedom of judgment and the 'power to interpret the foundations of faith according to his own mentality. We must judge the piety of each person's faith from his works alone. In this way everyone will be able to obey God with an unprejudiced and free spirit, and everyone will prize only justice and loving-kindness.

[29] After showing the freedom the revealed divine law grants everyone, I proceed to the second part of the question: [to show] that this

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29. Note that Spinoza presents the argument of the first six chapters as leading (non-demonstratively) to one of the principal conclusions of his work: that philosophy and theology are independent of one another (cf. Ch. xiv). But up to this point he has not explained the new method for interpreting Scripture (mentioned in §21) which equipped him to reach this conclusion. In Ch. vii he will explain the method, and then begin re-arguing the conclusion. His claim is that the revised argument is demonstrative.

30. ALM cite various medieval theologians who had held that philosophy should be subservient to (the handmaid of) theology, most notably Aquinas ST (I, qu. 1, art. 5) and Albertus Magnus (*Summa theologiae* Bk. I, Part I, Tractatus I, qu. 6). Cf. below §34.

10 same freedom not only can be granted without harm to the peace of the republic and the right of the supreme 'powers, but also that it must be granted, and cannot be taken away without great danger to the peace and great harm to the whole Republic.

To demonstrate these conclusions, I begin [in Ch. 16] with the  
 15 natural right of each person, which extends as far as each person's desire and power extend. By the right of nature no one is bound to live according to another person's mentality, but each one is the defender of his own freedom. [30] Moreover, I show that no one really gives up this right unless he transfers his 'power to defend himself to someone else, and that the person<sup>31</sup> who must necessarily retain this natural right absolutely is the one to whom everyone has transferred,  
 20 together with his 'power to defend himself, his right to live according to his own mentality.

From this I show that those who have the sovereignty have the right to do whatever they can do, that they alone are the defenders of right and freedom, and that everyone else ought always to act according to their decree alone. [31] But no one can so deprive himself<sup>32</sup> of his 'power to defend himself that he ceases to be a man. From this I  
 25 infer [in Ch. 17] that no one can be absolutely deprived of his natural right, but that subjects retain, as by a right of nature, certain things which cannot be taken from them without great danger to the state. If these things are not expressly agreed on with those who have the sovereignty, they are tacitly granted to the subjects.

From these considerations, I pass to the Republic of the Hebrews [Chs. 17 and 18], which I describe at sufficient length to show how, and  
 30 by whose<sup>33</sup> decree, Religion began to have the force of law; in passing I also show other things which seemed worth knowing. [32] Then I show [Ch. 19] that those who have sovereignty are the defenders and interpreters, not only of civil law, but also of sacred law, and that they alone have the right to decide what is just, what is unjust, what is pious and what impious. And finally [Ch. 20], I conclude that the sovereign  
 [III/12] powers retain this right best, and can preserve their rule safely, only if everyone is allowed to think what he will, and to say what he thinks.<sup>34</sup>

31. "The person" translates a personal pronoun which, as Bennett notes, might refer to either an individual or a collective agent.

32. The first edition has *privare*. Most editors (e.g., Gebhardt, Akkerman, et al.) emend to *se privare*; V-L (1914) emended to *privari*. Cf. xvii, 1, III/201/14–15.

33. Spinoza uses a plural pronoun here, implying that it was by human decree that religion began to have the force of law.

34. A recurrence of the allusion to Tacitus in §12, which also appears at III/239 and III/247.

[33] These, Philosophical reader,<sup>35</sup> are the things I here give you to examine. I trust that the importance and utility of the argument, both  
 5 in the work as a whole and in each chapter, will make it welcome. I might add several more things about this, but I don't want this preface to grow into a book, particularly since I believe the main points<sup>36</sup> are more than adequately known to Philosophers. As for those who are not philosophers, I am not eager to commend this treatise to them. There's  
 10 nothing in it which I might hope could please them in any way. I know how stubbornly the mind retains those prejudices the heart has embraced under the guise of piety. I know also that it's as impossible to save the common people from superstition as it is from fear. And I know, finally, that what the common people call constancy is obstinacy. It's not governed by reason, but carried away by an impulse to praise or to blame.

[34] I don't ask the common people to read these things, nor anyone else who is struggling with the same affects as the common people.  
 15 Indeed, I would prefer them to neglect this book entirely,<sup>37</sup> rather than make trouble by interpreting it perversely, as they usually do with everything. They will do themselves no good, but will harm others who would philosophize more freely if they weren't prevented by this one thought: that reason ought to be the handmaid of theology. For [those who need only to be set free of that prejudice], I'm confident that this work will be extremely useful.

20 [35] But since many will have neither the leisure nor perhaps the disposition to read through everything I've written, I'm constrained to warn here also, as I do at the end of this Treatise, that I write nothing which I do not most willingly submit to the examination and judgment

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35. A critical passage for the interpretation of the TTP. Who are the intended audience for Spinoza's work? For conflicting views, see Strauss 1988, 162–63; Harris 1978, 3; Donagan 1988, 14–15; and Smith 1997, 38–54. I take it that Spinoza is, as he appears to be, addressing the philosophical reader. But this does not necessarily mean that he is addressing only fully formed philosophers. I believe he particularly wants to address those would-be philosophers whose thinking is hampered by a prejudice about the authority of Scripture (see the end of §34, and cf. my comment on his correspondence with Van Blijenbergh, *Collected Works*, I, 350). I believe that exchange persuaded him that to secure a sympathetic hearing for his own work, he would have to show that in cases of conflict, the teachings of Scripture regarding speculative matters are not to be preferred to the demonstrations of philosophers. Cf. Letter 21 (IV/126) and Letter 23 (IV/145).

36. It would be highly paradoxical to write a book whose main points you took to be already known by its intended audience. But this sentence need not mean (as some have thought) that the main points of the book are already well-known to philosophers, only that the main points *Spinoza would make if he extended the Preface* are already well-known to philosophers. The best candidate for a philosopher who grasped the main points of the book is Hobbes, but he was unusual for his time both in his critical approach to Scripture and in the secular basis he provided for political theory. On the relation between Hobbes and Spinoza, see Curley 1992, 1994, and 1996.

37. Hence he discouraged translation of this work into Dutch. See Letter 44.

of the supreme 'Powers of my Country. For if they judge that any of the things I say are in conflict with the laws of my country, or harmful to the general welfare, I wish to withdraw it. I know that I am a man  
 25 and may have erred.<sup>38</sup> Still, I have taken great care not to err, and taken care especially that whatever I might write would be entirely consistent with the laws of my country, with piety and with morals.

[III/15]

## CHAPTER I Of Prophecy

5 [1] Prophecy, or Revelation, is the certain knowledge of some matter which God has revealed to men. And a Prophet is one who interprets God's revelations to those who cannot have certain knowledge of them, and who therefore can only embrace what has been revealed by simple  
 10 faith. For among the Hebrews a Prophet is called נביא, *nabi*,<sup>\*\*</sup> that is, spokesman and interpreter. But Scripture always uses this term for an interpreter of God, as we can infer from Exodus 7:1, where God says to Moses: *See, I make you a God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your Prophet*. This is as if he were to say that since Aaron performs the part of a Prophet, by interpreting what you say to Pharaoh, you will  
 15 therefore be like a God to Pharaoh, or one who acts in place of God.

[2] In the following Chapter we will discuss Prophets. Here the subject is Prophecy. From the definition just given, it follows that natural knowledge can be called Prophecy. For what we know by the natural  
 20 light depends only on the knowledge of God and of his<sup>2</sup> eternal decrees.

38. Alluding to a line from Terence's *Heautontimorumenos* 77. Cf. x, 36; xx, 470.

1. <sup>\*\*</sup>[ADN. I] If the third letter of the root of a word is quiescent, it is usually omitted and in its place the second letter of the stem is doubled. For example, omitting the quiescent ה from קלה we get קולל, and from that קול, and from נבא [to prophesy] comes נובב, from which we get ניב שפתים [the fruit of the lips] *utterance or speech*. Thus בוא becomes בוז or בוז (and from שגה comes משגה; שג, and שגה becomes המם; and בלה becomes בלל and בלעל). Therefore, R. Solomon Jarghi [Rashi] has interpreted this word נבא best; but Ibn Ezra, who did not know the Hebrew language so exactly, was mistaken in his criticism of him. Moreover, it should be noted that the term נבואה, *prophecy*, is quite general, and covers every kind of prophesying, whereas the other terms are more specific and apply chiefly to this or that kind of prophesying. I believe this is well-known to the learned. [Rashi glossed נביא as *interpreter*. See his commentary on Exod. 7:1, in Rashi 1960, II, 29. Ibn Ezra understood נביא as *spokesman*. Spinoza had the commentaries of both authors available to him in Buxtorf's Bible.]

2. It's worth noting that in contexts like this Spinoza's Latin uses a pronoun which implies neither gender nor even personality. In principle *ejus* could be rendered either

But because this natural knowledge is common to all men (depending, as it does, on foundations common to all), the common people, who always thirst for things rare and foreign to their nature, who spurn their natural gifts, do not value it highly. When they speak of prophetic  
25 knowledge, they mean to exclude natural knowledge.

[3] Nevertheless, we can call natural knowledge divine with as much right as anything else, since God's nature, insofar as we participate in it, and his decrees, as it were, dictate it to us.<sup>3</sup> It differs from the knowledge everyone calls divine only in two respects: the knowledge people call divine extends beyond the limits of natural knowledge, and the laws  
30 of human Nature, considered in themselves, cannot be the cause of the knowledge people call divine. But natural knowledge is in no way  
[III/16] inferior to prophetic knowledge in the certainty it involves, or in the source from which it is derived, viz. God—unless, perhaps, someone wants to understand (or rather to dream) that the Prophets had, indeed, a human body, but not a human mind, and thus that their sensations  
5 and consciousness were of an entirely different nature than ours are.

[4] Though natural knowledge is divine, nevertheless those who pass it on cannot be called Prophets.<sup>4\*\*</sup> For they teach things other men can perceive and embrace with as much certainty and excellence as they do,

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"his," "her," or "its." In English we must either adopt an ugly neologism or choose one of these pronouns, which makes Spinoza sound more specific than he is. How much should we make of this? Not too much, I think. The next word in this phrase, "decrees," certainly suggests a personal agent. And even traditional theologians who use the masculine pronoun in relation to God, do not normally think of God as literally having a gender. More significant is Spinoza's talk of decrees, which reflects a willingness to express his thought in a way he knows may mislead some readers into thinking that he is closer to the tradition than he really is.

3. Gebhardt notes that Meyer expresses a similar view (Meyer 1666, 43, = v, 7). ALM compare Aquinas ST I, qu. 12, art. 11, ad 3.

4. \*\*[ADN. II] That is, interpreters of God. For an interpreter of God is one who interprets God's decrees to others to whom they have not been revealed, and who, in embracing them, rely only on the authority of the prophet. But if the men who listened to prophets became prophets, as those who listen to philosophers become philosophers, then the prophet would not be an interpreter of the divine decrees, since his hearers would rely, not on the testimony and authority of the prophet, but on revelation itself, and internal testimony. Thus the sovereign powers are the interpreters of the law of their state, because the laws they pass are preserved only by their authority and depend only on their testimony. [This note, as I have translated it, is essentially the version we have in the copy of the TTP Spinoza gave Jacob Klefmann. See the Editorial Preface to the TTP, pp. 60–63, for a discussion of the sources for these notes. We have four other sources for the note, which differ from this version mainly in small ways. The most interesting variation, found in all the other sources, has, instead of the phrase underlined above: "and their certainty depends only on the authority of the prophet and the faith they have in him." The thought is reminiscent of Hobbes' *Leviathan* vii, 7. I propose that since the other four versions are later than the Klefmann version, their consistency suggests that after writing notes in the Klefmann volume, Spinoza decided that this formula expressed his thought more clearly.]

10 and not by faith alone. [5] Therefore, since our mind—simply from the fact that it contains God’s Nature objectively in itself, and participates in it—has the power to form certain notions which explain the nature of things and teach us how to conduct our lives, we can rightly maintain that the nature of the mind, insofar as it is conceived in this way, is the  
 15 first cause of divine revelation. For whatever we clearly and distinctly understand, the idea and nature of God dictates to us (as we have just indicated), not indeed in words, but in a far more excellent way, which agrees best with the nature of the mind. Anyone who has tasted the certainty of the intellect must have experienced this in himself.

20 [6] But my principal purpose is to speak only of what concerns Scripture. So these few words about the natural Light are enough. Now I’ll discuss in greater detail the other causes and means by which God reveals to men things which exceed the limits of natural knowledge—and even those which do not exceed them. For nothing prevents God from communicating to men in other ways the same things we know  
 25 by the light of nature.

[7] But whatever can be said about these matters must be sought only from Scripture. For what can we say about things exceeding the limits of our intellect beyond what’s been handed down to us, either orally or in writing, from the Prophets themselves? And because today,  
 30 so far as I know, we have no Prophets,<sup>5</sup> our only option is to expound the sacred books left us by the Prophets. But with this precaution: we should not maintain anything about such matters, or attribute anything to the Prophets themselves, which they did not say clearly and repeatedly.

[8] Here it is to be noted particularly that the Jews never mention—nor do they heed—intermediate, *or* particular, causes,<sup>6</sup> but for the  
 [III/17] sake of religion and of piety, *or* (as is commonly said) of devotion, they always recur to God. For example, if they have made money by trade,

5. Whether prophecy had actually ceased at some point in history has been a matter of dispute in both the Jewish and the Christian traditions. Certainly claims to prophecy did not cease, as the case of Sabbatai Zevi illustrates. See the note on Zevi in Letter 33, IV/178/26, and Goldish 2004. Some seventeenth-century Christian sects also claimed a contemporary power of prophecy (see Kolakowski 1969). These included the Collegiants, with whom Spinoza otherwise had much in common (cf. Nadler 1999, 139–41). But because of the difficulty of distinguishing true prophets from false, and the tendency of prophecy to challenge the religious status quo, religious institutions often opposed them. For a helpful discussion, see Sommer 1996. Talmudic passages on the disappearance of prophecy include Sanhedrin 11a and Sota 48b. Maimonides’ view seems to be that prophecy was taken away during the exile and will be restored when the Messiah comes. Cf. *Guide* II, 36.

6. For this view Spinoza could have cited the authority of Maimonides’ *Guide* II, 48. Cf. below, §§30–31. ALM also note Spinoza’s *Hebrew Grammar*, ch. 12: “The Hebrews are accustomed to refer an action to its principal cause, which brings it about either that an action is done by something/someone, or that a thing fulfills its function” (I/341/18).

they say that God has given it to them; if they desire that something should happen, they say that God has so disposed their heart; and if they even think something, they say that God has told them this. So we must not regard as Prophecy and supernatural knowledge everything Scripture says God has told someone, but only what Scripture explicitly says was Prophecy *or* revelation, or whose status as prophecy follows from the circumstances of the narration.

[9] If, then, we run through the Sacred books, we will see that everything God revealed to the Prophets was revealed to them either in words, or in visible forms, or in both words and visible forms. The words and the visible forms were either true, and outside the imagination of the Prophet who heard or saw them, or else imaginary, occurring because the imagination of the Prophet was so disposed, even while he was awake, that he clearly seemed to himself to hear words or to see something.<sup>7</sup>

[10] It was by a true voice that God revealed to Moses the Laws he willed to be prescribed to the Hebrews, as is evident from Exodus 25:22, where he says ונועדתי לך שם ודברתי אתך מעל הכפורת מבין שני הכרובים *and I will be available to you there, and I will speak with you from that part of the cover which is between the two cherubim*. This indeed shows that God used a true voice, since Moses used to find God there, available to speak to him, whenever he wanted to. And as I shall soon show, this voice by which the law was pronounced was the only true voice.

[11] I would suspect that the voice with which God called Samuel was a true one, because in 1 Samuel 3:21 it is said: ויוסף יהיה להראות בשלה *and God appeared again to Samuel in Shiloh because God revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of God*<sup>8</sup>—as if he were saying that God's appearance to Samuel was nothing but God's revealing himself to Samuel by his word, or was nothing but Samuel's hearing God speaking. But because we are forced to distinguish between the Prophecy of Moses and that of the rest of the Prophets, we must say that the voice Samuel heard was imaginary.<sup>9</sup>

7. Insofar as Spinoza emphasizes the importance of the imagination in prophecy, his view is similar to that of Maimonides. Cf. the *Guide* II, 32–48. Maimonides' view is that prophecy normally requires intellectual perfection (through study of the speculative sciences), moral perfection (through the suppression of improper desires), and perfection of the imagination. But he does make an exception for Moses, whose prophecy is supposed to have involved only the intellect, not the imagination. See particularly *Guide* II, 36. The treatment of prophecy in Aquinas ST II-II, qu. 171–74, is quite different. Spinoza's disagreements with Maimonides will emerge gradually, beginning in i, 43.

8. The first occurrence of "to Samuel" in this quote is lacking in the Hebrew. For the use of the divine name here, see the Glossary entry GOD.

9. Presumably we are forced to this interpretation by the passage from Num. 12:6–8, to be cited at III/20/13. But Numbers forces that interpretation only if we assume that



We can also infer this from the fact that the voice resembled that of Eli, which Samuel was very accustomed to hearing, and so could also more readily imagine. For although God called him three times, he [III/18] thought that Eli had called him.<sup>10</sup>

[12] The voice Abimelech heard was imaginary. For Genesis 20:6 says: *And God said to him in his dreams* etc. So he was able to imagine the will of God, not while he was awake, but only in dreams (i.e., at that time when the imagination is naturally most suited to imagine 5 things which do not exist).

[13] In the opinion of certain Jews, God did not utter the words of the Decalogue.<sup>11</sup> They think, rather, that the Israelites only heard a sound, which did not utter any words, and that while this sound lasted, they perceived the Laws of the Decalogue with a pure mind. At one time I too was inclined to think this, because I saw that the words of 10 the Decalogue in Exodus are not the same as those of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy.<sup>12</sup> Since God spoke only once, it seems to follow from this [variation] that the Decalogue does not intend to teach God's very words, but only their meaning.

[14] But unless we wish to do violence to Scripture, we absolutely must grant that the Israelites heard a true voice. For Scripture expressly 15 says, in Deuteronomy 5:4 *וְגו' יהוה עמכם דבר פנים בפנים face to face God spoke to you etc.*,<sup>13</sup> that is, as two men usually communicate their concepts to one another, by means of their two bodies. So it seems more compatible with Scripture to think that God truly created some voice,

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1 Samuel must be consistent with Numbers. The Preface has warned us (in §19) that this assumption is not safe.

10. See 1 Sam. 3:4–9. Cf. Maimonides *Guide* II, 44.

11. Maimonides *Guide* II, 33, argues that at Mount Sinai Moses alone heard God's words. All the people heard was a great voice, not words. Halevi 1964, I, 87, argues that they heard the words. There are reasons to think that all the people heard the first two commandments, but that Moses alone heard the rest, and then conveyed them to the people. See Kugel 2007, 251–53.

12. This rare autobiographical remark may give us insight into the kinds of concern which led to Spinoza's break with the synagogue. Manasseh's *Conciliator* (I, 170–75) discusses several differences between the two accounts of the Decalogue (in Exod. 20:1–17 and Deut. 5:1–21). Some may strike modern readers as rather minor (unless they are committed to a strong position about the historical accuracy of the two accounts). The most significant difference, probably, occurs in the explanation of the commandment regarding the Sabbath. Exodus instructs the Jews not to labor on the Sabbath in remembrance of God's having rested on the seventh day of creation. Deuteronomy commands them not to labor on the Sabbath in remembrance of God's freeing them from bondage in the land of Egypt. Spinoza will return to this topic at the end of viii, 55.

13. These are Moses' words to the people, so the pronoun, both in the Hebrew and in Spinoza's Latin, is plural. *Prima facie* this conflicts with Num. 12:6–8, discussed below, in §21.



by which he himself revealed the Decalogue.<sup>14</sup> As for the explanation  
 20 of why the words and reasons of the one version differ from those of  
 the other, see Chapter 8.<sup>15</sup>

[15] However, this doesn't remove every difficulty. For it seems quite  
 unreasonable to maintain that a created thing, dependent on God in  
 the same way as any other, could express, in reality or in words, or  
 25 explain through his own person, the essence or existence of God, by  
 saying in the first person, "I am the LORD your God, etc."<sup>16</sup> Of course,  
 when someone says orally "I have understood," no one thinks that the  
 mouth of the man saying this has understood, but only that his mind  
 has. Nevertheless, because the mouth is related to the nature of the  
 man saying this, and also because he to whom it is said has previously  
 30 perceived the nature of the intellect, he easily understands the thought  
 of the man speaking by comparison with his own. [16] But since these  
 people knew nothing of God but his name, and wanted to speak to  
 him to become certain of his Existence, I do not see how their request  
 would be fulfilled by a creature who was no more related to God than  
 any other creature, and who did not pertain to God's nature, saying  
 [III/19] "I am God." What if God had twisted Moses' lips to pronounce and  
 say the same words, "I am God"? Would they have understood from  
 that that God exists? What if they were the lips, not of Moses, but of  
 some beast?<sup>17</sup>

[17] Next, Scripture seems to indicate, without qualification, that  
 5 God himself spoke—that was why he descended from heaven to the  
 top of Mt. Sinai—and that the Jews not only heard him speaking, but  
 that the Elders even saw him. See Exodus 24[:10–11].<sup>18</sup>

The Law revealed to Moses (to which nothing could be added and  
 from which nothing could be taken away, and which was established as  
 the legislation of their Country) never commanded us to believe that  
 10 God is incorporeal, or that he has no image *or* visible form, but only

14. This was the opinion of Maimonides (*Guide* II, 33).

15. At the end of Ch. viii (§§55–58) and at the beginning of Ch. ix (§§1–3) Spinoza will return to this topic, explaining that the variations between the two versions of the Decalogue resulted from the history of the composition of the text. Here he is content merely to catalogue some of the difficulties which face more traditional interpreters.

16. Spinoza writes *ego sum Jehova Deus tuus*. In general I prefer to use "Yahweh" when Spinoza writes *Jehova*. (See the Glossary entry GOD, YAHWEH.) But in this instance it seemed best to use the language which has been traditional in English versions of the passages Spinoza is quoting (Exod. 20:2 and Deut. 5:6).

17. This was a problem which concerned Spinoza early in his career. Cf. KV II, xxiv, 10. ALM discuss a parallel passage in Balling's *Het licht op den kandelaar*, p. 8. For a modern edition of this work, see Klever 1988.

18. Discussed in Manasseh 1842/1972, I, 186–89, because of its apparent conflict with Exod. 33:20.

to believe that God exists, to trust in him, and to worship him alone. It did command them not to ascribe any image to him, and not to make any image of him. But this was to prevent them from departing from his worship. [18] For since they had not seen the image of God, they could not make an image which would resemble God, but only  
 15 one which would resemble some other created thing they had seen. So when they worshipped God through that image, they would think, not about God, but about the thing the image resembled. In the end they would bestow on that thing the honor and worship due to God.

But Scripture clearly indicates that God has a visible form and that it was granted to Moses, when he heard God speaking, to look upon  
 20 it, though he was permitted to see only the back.<sup>19</sup> I do not doubt but what there is some mystery concealed here, which we shall discuss more fully later.<sup>20</sup> For now I shall continue to show the places where Scripture indicates the means God used to reveal his decrees to men.

[19] That Revelation [sometimes] happened by images alone is evident from 1 Chronicles 21[:16] where God shows his anger to David through an Angel holding a sword in his hand. Similarly [God showed his anger] to Balaam [in the same way].<sup>21</sup> Maimonides and others claim that this story, and likewise all those that tell the appearance of an angel (e.g., to Manoah [Judges 13:8–20], and to Abraham when he was intending to sacrifice his son [Genesis 22:11–18]), happened in a  
 30 dream,<sup>22</sup> because a person could not see an Angel with his eyes open. But that's nonsense, of course. Their only concern is to extort from Scripture Aristotelian rubbish and their own inventions. Nothing seems to me more ridiculous.

[20] On the other hand, when God revealed his future Dominion  
 35 to Joseph [Genesis 37:5–10], he used images which were not real, but depended only on the imagination of the Prophet.

[III/20] God used both images and words to reveal to Joshua that he would fight for the [Israelites]. He showed him an Angel with a sword [who came] as commander of the army [Joshua 5:13]. He had [previously] revealed this to him in words [Joshua 1:1–9, 3:7] and Joshua heard it [again] from the Angel [Joshua 5:14].

19. See Exod. 33:20–23. Discussed in Manasseh 1842/1972, I, 201–2, because of its apparent conflict with Exod. 33:11 and Num. 12:8.

20. ALM suggest that Spinoza has in mind the discussion (in Ch. xv) of Alfakhar, who held that because Scripture teaches clearly that God is incorporeal, passages apparently to the contrary must be interpreted metaphorically. But he may also be referring to the discussion of the inadequacy of Moses' conception of God in ii, 41–46.

21. See Num. 22:22–35. Since Balaam not only saw the angel, but heard him speak, this seems better as an example of a revelation through both words and visible forms.

22. See Maimonides *Guide* II, 41–42.

To Isaiah also, as we are told in ch. 6, it was represented through  
 5 visible forms that God's providence was deserting the people: he imagined God thrice holy, seated on a throne on high, and the Israelites stained with the uncleanness of their sins, as if mired in a dung-heap, and indeed, very distant from God. By these [visible forms] he understood that the present state of the people was most wretched. On the  
 10 other hand, the people's future calamities were revealed to him in words, pronounced as if by God.<sup>23</sup> I could add many other examples of this pattern from the Sacred Texts, if I did not think these matters were well enough known to everyone.

[21] But all these things are confirmed more clearly from the text of Numbers 12:[6–8], which reads:

15 אם יהיה נביאכם יהוה במראה אליו אתודע בחלום אדבר בו לא כן עבדי משה וכוּ פה אל  
 יבט if there is some Prophet of God  
 among you, I shall reveal myself to him in a vision

(that is, through visible forms and obscure symbols, for of the Prophecy of Moses he says that it is a vision without obscure symbols),

*I shall speak to him in dreams*

(that is, not with real words and a true voice).

20 But to Moses (I do) not (reveal myself) in this way, etc.; to him I speak face to face, and in a vision, but not with enigmatic sayings; and he looks upon the image of God,<sup>24</sup>

that is, he looks upon me as a companion and is not terrified when he speaks with me, as is maintained in Exodus 33:11. So there can be no doubt that the other Prophets did not hear a true voice. This is confirmed still further by Deuteronomy 34:10, where it is said that  
 25 there never existed ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה אשר ידעו יהוה פנים אל פנים (strictly, arose) in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom God knew face to face. This must be understood to refer to the voice alone. For not even Moses had ever seen God's face (Exodus 33:[20]).<sup>25</sup>

23. *tanquam a Deo prolatis*. *Tanquam* need not imply that God did not in fact pronounce the words. But the beginning of the next paragraph seems to favor a counterfactual reading.

24. Spinoza will return to this passage in viii, 15–16, where he will cite it as one among many indicating that the true author of the Pentateuch was not Moses, but someone writing at a much later date. HCSB observes that this passage “probably reflects the issues of a later day, when groups who traced their authority to Moses were in a power struggle with groups who traced their authority to Miriam or Aaron.” For a fuller discussion, see Levine 1993, 328–31.

25. Though as Spinoza has noted above (§18), Moses was permitted to see God's back. On Moses' unique relationship to God, see Maimonides *Guide* II, 35; Aquinas ST IIa IIae, qu. 174, art. 4; and Hobbes, *Leviathan* xxxvi, 11.

30 [22] I do not find in the Sacred Texts any other means by which God communicated himself to men.<sup>26</sup> So, as we have shown above, we must not feign or admit any others. Of course, we clearly understand that God can communicate himself immediately to men, for he communicates his essence to our mind without using any corporeal means. Nevertheless, for a man to perceive by the mind alone things which  
[III/21] aren't contained in the first foundations of our knowledge, and can't be deduced from them, his mind would necessarily have to be more excellent than, and far superior to, the human mind.

[23] So I do not believe that anyone else has reached such perfection, surpassing all others, except Christ, to whom the decisions of God, which lead men to salvation, were revealed immediately—without words or visions. So God revealed himself to the Apostles through Christ's mind, as previously he had revealed himself to Moses by means of a heavenly voice. And therefore Christ's voice, like the one Moses heard,  
10 can be called the voice of God. And in this sense we can also say that God's Wisdom, that is, a Wisdom surpassing human wisdom, assumed a human nature in Christ, and that Christ was the way to salvation.<sup>27</sup>

[24] But I must warn here that I'm not speaking in any way about the things some of the Churches maintain about Christ. Not that I deny  
15 them. For I readily confess that I don't grasp them.<sup>28</sup> What I have just affirmed I conclude from Scripture itself. Nowhere have I read that God appeared or spoke to Christ, but rather that God was revealed to the Apostles through Christ, that he is the way to salvation [John 14:6], and finally, that the old law was imparted by an Angel, but not by God

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26. Spinoza will return to this conclusion at i, 43, and again invoke his principle that we must not ascribe to Scripture doctrines which we do not find clearly stated there. The intervening sections seem intended to deflate the idea of divine inspiration.

27. Since Latin has no articles, the text does not explicitly say that Christ is *the* way to salvation, but I think no harm is done by supplying the definite article (as Glazemaker did), provided we understand this statement in a way which does not conflict with Spinoza's fundamental pluralism: not that we can achieve salvation only by believing that the son of God atoned for the sins of mankind through his death on the cross, but that we achieve salvation by living according to Jesus' central moral teachings: to love God and our neighbors, and to practice justice. The former interpretation would seem to be excluded by v, 46; xv, 44; xvi, 57; and Letters 73 and 76. In Curley 2010, I argued that Spinoza was a pluralist (in the sense of believing that many religions offer a viable path to salvation). In TP ii, 6 Spinoza rejects the doctrine of original sin, a key support for the view that salvation is based on faith in Christ, and not on obedience to the laws of God.

28. In Letter 71 (IV/304/14ff.) Oldenburg reported that some readers of the TTP felt that he was concealing his opinion concerning Jesus Christ, "the Redeemer of the World and only Mediator for men." When Oldenburg asked for clarification of Spinoza's views, his response (Letter 73, IV/309/2) went beyond saying merely that he did not understand what certain churches mean when they say that God assumed a human nature in Christ. He said he found that doctrine absurd and contradictory. For further discussion, see Matheron 1971, 256–58.

20 immediately. So, if Moses spoke with God face to face, as a man usually does with a companion (i.e., by means of their two bodies), Christ, indeed, communicated with God mind to mind.

[25] We have asserted, then, that except for Christ no one has received God's revelations without the aid of the imagination, i.e., without the  
25 aid of words or images. So no one needed to have a more perfect mind in order to prophesy, but only a more vivid imagination. I shall show this more clearly in the following chapter.

Now the question is what the Sacred Texts understand by the Spirit of God when they say that the Prophets were infused<sup>29</sup> with the Spirit of God, or that the Prophets spoke by the Spirit of God. To investigate this, first we must ask about the meaning of the Hebrew term רוח  
30 *ruagh*, which people commonly translate "Spirit."<sup>30</sup>

[26] In its proper sense the term רוח *ruagh* means wind, as is generally known. But it is quite often used to mean many other things, which are nevertheless derived from the proper sense. For it is taken to mean

1. breath, as in Psalm 135:17, אף אין יש רוח בפיהם *there is no Spirit in their mouth*.

[III/22] 2. air or breathing, as in 1 Samuel 30:12, ותשב רוחו אליו *and his Spirit returned to him*, i.e., he recovered his breath.

From this it is taken for

3. courage and strength, as in Joshua 2:11, ולא קמה עוד רוח באיש *afterward there was no Spirit left in any man*. Similarly, Ezekiel 2:2, ותבא בי רוח ותעמידני *and a Spirit (or force) came into me, which made me stand upon my feet*.

From this it is taken for

5 4. excellence and ability, as in Job 32:8, אכן רוח הוא באנוש *certainly it is the Spirit itself in a man*, that is, 'knowledge is not to be sought exclusively among the old, for I find now that it depends on the particular excellence and capacity of the man. So also Numbers 27:18, איש אשר בו רוח *a man in whom there is Spirit*.

[27] Next, it is taken for

10 5. the sentiment of the heart, as in Numbers 14:24, עקב היתה רוח אחרת עמו *since another Spirit was in him*, that is, another sentiment of the heart, or another mind. Similarly, Proverbs 1:23, אביעה לכם רוחי *I shall express my Spirit* (i.e.,

29. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan* ii, 9.

30. Spinoza discusses the scriptural meaning of *ruagh* in §§26–28. In §§29–31 he proceeds to discuss what it means in Scripture when something is said to be "of God." Finally, in §§32–39, he concludes by applying the results of this analysis to the complex expressions *ruagh Elohim* or *ruagh Yabweb*. The Latin term Spinoza uses for *ruagh*, *Spiritus*, has much of the ambiguity of *ruagh*. Its English cognate does not have so wide a range of meanings. Maimonides had discussed the ambiguity of *ruagh* in his *Guide* I, 40.

- mind) to you. And in this sense it is used to mean the will, or decision, the appetite, and the impulse of the heart, as in Ezekiel 1:12, אל אשר יהיה שמה, אלהים ילכו *where there was a Spirit (or a will) to go, they went*. Similarly, Isaiah 30:1, וילנסוך מסכה ולא רוחי, *for pouring out a libation, but not of my Spirit*.<sup>31</sup> And in Isaiah 29:10, כי נסך עליהם יהוה רוח תרדמה, *because God has poured out upon them<sup>32</sup> the Spirit (i.e., the appetite) of sleeping*. And in Judges 8:3, אז רפתה רוחם, *then their Spirit (or impulse) was softened*. Similarly in Proverbs 16:32, עיר מלכד עיר, *he who rules his Spirit (or appetite) [is better] than he who takes a city*. Similarly in Proverbs 25:28, איש אין מעצור לרוחו, *a man who does not restrain his Spirit*. And Isaiah 33:11, אש תאכלכם רוחכם, *your Spirit is a fire, which consumes you*.

[28] Next, this term רוח, *ruagh*, insofar as it means heart, serves to express all the passions of the heart, and even its endowments, as רוח גבוהה *a lofty Spirit*, to mean pride; רוח שפלה *a lowly Spirit*, to mean humility; רוח טובה *a good Spirit*, to mean hate and melancholy; רוח רעה *a bad Spirit*, to mean kindness; רוח קנאה *a Spirit of jealousy*; רוח זנונים *a Spirit (or appetite) of fornications*; רוח חכמה עצה גבורה *a Spirit of wisdom, counsel and strength*, i.e., (for in Hebrew we use substantives more frequently than adjectives), a wise, prudent and strong mind, or the virtue of wisdom, counsel and strength; רוח חן *a Spirit of benevolence*, etc.

[III/23] 6. It means the mind itself or soul, as in Ecclesiastes 3:19: ורוח אחד לכל *the Spirit (or soul) is the same in all*,<sup>33</sup> and ורוח תשוב אל האלהים *the Spirit returns to God*.<sup>34</sup>

7. Finally, it means the regions of the world (on account of the winds which blow from them), and also the sides of each thing, which face those regions of the world. See Ezekiel 37:9, and 42:16, 17, 18, 19, etc.

[29] It should be noted now that a thing is related to God, and is said to be of God,

31. Spinoza's translation here is more literal than is common in more recent versions. The pouring of a libation was a common ceremony at the conclusion of alliances. Hence, the NRSV translation has "who make an alliance, but against my will."

32. Spinoza's Hebrew text reads עליהם *upon them*, whereas the Masoretic text, which is the basis for most translations, reads עליכם *upon you* (pl.).

33. I.e. (as the biblical context makes clear): men and animals share the same fate, death. The fundamental similarity between humans and other animals was also a theme in Uriel da Costa's denial of immortality. Cf. Gebhardt 1922, 66; Osier 1983, 102.

34. Spinoza does not identify the passage from which this quotation comes (Eccles. 12:7), but it, along with Eccles. 3:19, was prominent in the debates about immortality. In Manasseh 1842/1972 (II, 312–15) Manasseh ben Israel had also juxtaposed these two verses, taking 12:17 to be a proof of the immortality of the soul, and 3:19 to be an "apparently contradictory" verse which required explanation. These are passages we would expect to have been of particular interest to the young Spinoza at the time of his departure from the synagogue, given what Lucas and Revah tell us about his religious doubts (Lucas 1927, 45–46; Revah 1959, 18, 36). See also x, 45; Nadler 2001; and Kaplan 1989.

1. because it pertains to God's nature, and is, as it were, a part of God, as when one says כח יהוה *God's power*, עיני יהוה *God's eyes*;
- 10 2. because it is in God's 'power, and acts from God's command, as in the sacred texts the heavens are called שמי יהוה *the heavens of God*, because they are the chariot and the dwelling place of God, Assyria is called the whip of God, and Nebuchadnezzar, the servant of God, etc.;
3. because it is dedicated to God, היכל יהוה *temple of God*, נזיר אלהים *Nazarite of God*, לחם יהוה *bread of God*, etc.
4. because it is imparted through the Prophets, but not revealed through the natural light; for that reason, the Law of Moses is called the Law of God.
5. to express the thing in a superlative degree, הררי אל *mountains of God*, i.e., very high mountains, תרדמת יהוה *a sleep of God*, i.e., a very deep sleep; it is in this sense that Amos 4:11 is to be explained, when God himself speaks thus: הפכתי אתכם כמהפכת אלהים את סדום ואת עמורה *I have destroyed you, as God's destruction* (destroyed) *Sodom and Gomorrah*, i.e., as I did in that memorable destruction; for when God himself speaks, it cannot properly be explained otherwise. Even Solomon's natural 'knowledge is called God's 'knowledge, i.e., 'knowledge which is divine or beyond common 'knowledge.<sup>35</sup> Also, in the Psalms, [certain trees] are called ארזי אל *cedars of God*, to express their unusual size. And in 1 Samuel 11:7, to refer to a very great fear, it is said
- 25 ויפל פחד יהוה על העם *and the fear of God fell upon the people*.

[30] And in this sense, the Jews used to refer to God everything which surpassed their power of understanding, and whose natural causes they did not then know.<sup>36</sup> So, a storm was called גערת יהוה *God's rebuke*, and thunder and lightning were called God's arrows. For they thought that God kept the winds shut up in caves, which they called God's treasures. Their difference from the Pagans was just that they believed it was God, not Aeolus, who was the ruler of the winds.

That's also why they called miracles works of God, i.e., works to be [III/24] astonished at. For of course, all natural things are God's works, and exist and act only through the divine power. It's in this sense that the Psalmist calls the miracles of Egypt God's powers, because in a situation of extreme danger they opened up the way to deliverance for the Hebrews, who were expecting nothing like them, and hence were amazed by them.

- 5 [31] So when unusual works of nature are called works of God, and trees of unusual size are called trees of God, it is no wonder that in Genesis the strongest men, and those of great stature, are called sons

35. Referring, perhaps, to 1 Kings 3:28.

36. Earlier, in §8, Spinoza's view seemed to be that it was characteristic of the Jews to refer *everything* to God, even those common things whose natural causes they knew.



of God, even though they are immoral robbers and libertines.<sup>37</sup> Hence,  
 10 the ancients—not only the Jews, but even the Pagans—used to refer to  
 God absolutely everything in which one man surpassed the others. For  
 when the Pharaoh heard Joseph’s interpretation of his dream, he said  
 that the mind of the Gods<sup>38</sup> was in him; and again, Nebuchadnezzar  
 said to Daniel that he had the mind of the Holy Gods.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore,  
 nothing is more frequent among the Latins. For they say that things  
 which have been made ingeniously have been fashioned by a divine  
 15 hand. If anyone wished to translate this into Hebrew, he would have  
 to say *fashioned by the hand of God*, as Hebraists well know.

[32] From these observations, we can easily understand and explain  
 those Passages in Scripture which mention the Spirit of God. In cer-  
 tain places רוח אלהים, *the Spirit of God*, and רוח יהוה, *the Spirit of Yahweh*,  
 20 mean nothing other than a wind which is very violent, very dry and  
 destructive, as in Isaiah 40:7, רוח יהוה נושבה בו *the wind of Yahweh blew*  
*on it*, i.e., a very dry and destructive wind. Similarly in Genesis 1:2,  
*and a wind of God (or a very strong wind) was moving over the water*.

[33] Next, [*ruagh Elobim* or *ruagh Yahweh*] means a great heart. For  
 25 the Sacred Texts call Gideon’s heart, and Samson’s, רוח יהוה, the Spirit  
 of God, i.e., a very daring heart, ready for anything.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, any  
 extraordinary virtue or force is called רוח יהוה, *the Spirit* or *virtue of God*,  
 as in Exodus 31:3, ואמלא אותו רוח אלהים *and I shall fill him* (viz., Bezalel)  
*with the Spirit of God*, i.e., as Scripture itself explains, with understanding  
 30 and skill beyond the ordinary lot of men. So in Isaiah 11:2, ונוחה עליו רוח  
 יהוה *and the Spirit of God shall rest upon him*, i.e., as the Prophet himself  
 declares, explaining it afterward in detail (in a manner very commonly  
 used in the Sacred Texts): the virtues of wisdom, counsel, strength, etc.  
 So also Saul’s melancholy is called רוח אלהים רעה, *an evil Spirit of God*, i.e.,  
 [III/25] a very deep melancholy.<sup>41</sup> For Saul’s servants, who called his melancholy

37. Probably a reference to Gen. 6:2, “the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair; and they took them wives, whomsoever they chose.” Nachmanides, whose interpretation Spinoza perhaps follows, took this to mean that they took their wives by force, even from among those who were already married to others.

38. *mentem deorum*. A reference to Gen. 41:38, where the Hebrew is רוח אלהים *ruagh Elobim*, usually translated “spirit of God.” Though plural in form, אלהים (*Elobim*), is often treated as a singular term. But since Spinoza emphasizes that the Pharaoh was a pagan, he presumably did not want to make him sound like a monotheist.

39. A reference to Dan. 4:8–9. The Hebrew is *ruagh Elobin*, but in this case biblical translators typically treat *Elobin* as plural.

40. For example, in Judg. 6:34; 14:6, 19; 15:14 (ALM).

41. The reference is to 1 Sam. 18:10. Modern commentators are apt to see Saul as suffering from some form of mental illness, perhaps manic depression. Cf. Anchor Samuel I, 280–81. In antiquity such illnesses were regularly attributed to the agency of evil spirits. SC observes here that “to the Hebraic mind there was no power of evil independent of



a melancholy of God, urged him to call a musician to him, who would revive his spirits by playing the lyre. This shows that by a *melancholy of God* they understood a natural melancholy.

- 5 [34] Next, רוח יהוה, *the Spirit of God*, means the mind itself of man, as in Job 27:3, ורוח אלה באפי *and the Spirit of God is in my nostrils*, alluding to what is said in Genesis [2:7], that God breathed the breath of life into the nostrils of man. So Ezekiel, prophesying to the dead, says (37:14), ונתתי רוحي בכם וחיייתם *and I shall give my Spirit to you and you shall live*, i.e.,
- 10 I shall restore life to you. And in this sense it is said in Job 34:14, אם ישים אליו לבו רוחו ונשמתו אליו יאסוף *if he (viz., God) wishes, he will gather his Spirit (i.e., the mind which he gave us) and his breath back to himself*. We must understand Genesis 6:3 in the same way: לא ידון רוحي באדם לעולם *my Spirit shall not reason (or shall not decide) in man for ever; since he is flesh*, i.e., after this man shall act from the decisions of the flesh, and not those of the mind, which I gave him to discern the good. So also Psalm 51:12–13 [= KJV, RSV 10–11]: לב טהור ברא לי אלהים: *create a pure heart in me, O God, and renew in me an appropriate (or moderate) Spirit (i.e., appetite); do not cast me away from your sight, nor take the mind of your holiness away from me*. Because sins were believed to arise only from the flesh—the mind recommending only the good—[the Psalmist] asks for God's aid against the appetite of the flesh, but prays only that the
- 25 mind the Holy God gave him be preserved by God.

[35] Now, because the common people are weak, Scripture usually depicts God as being like a man, and attributes to God a mind, a heart, affects of the heart—even a body and breath. As a result, the Sacred Texts often use רוח יהוה *the Spirit of God*, for the mind, i.e., the heart, affect, force, and breath of the mouth, of God. So Isaiah 40:13 says: מי תכן את רוח יהוה? *who has directed the Spirit (or mind) of God?* i.e., who, besides God himself, has determined God's mind to will something? And in Isaiah 63:10, והמה מרו ועצבו את רוח קדשו, *and they affected the Spirit of his holiness with bitterness and sadness*.

- [36] That's how it happens that [the phrase רוח יהוה] is customarily used for the Law of Moses, because it explains, as it were, the mind of
- [III/26] God—as Isaiah himself says (in 63:11): *where is he who put the Spirit of his holiness in the midst of them?*, i.e., the Law of Moses. This is clear from the whole context of the utterance. Similarly in Nehemiah 9:20, ורוחך הטובה נתת להשכילם, *and you have given them your good Spirit, or mind, to make them understand*. For he is speaking of

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and opposed to God. Good and evil equally were in the power of God, and therefore the spirit which afflicted Saul is described as sent by Him.”

the time of the Law, and he alludes also to Deuteronomy 4:6, where Moses says: *since it* (viz. the Law) *is your 'knowledge and wisdom*, etc. So also in Psalms 143:10, *רוחך טובה תנחני בארץ משור* *your good mind will lead me into a level land*, i.e., your mind, revealed to us, will lead me into the right path.

[37] The Spirit of God also means, as we have said, God's breath, which is also improperly attributed to God in Scripture, just as a mind, heart, and a body are.<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Psalm 33:6.

Next, [the Spirit of God also means] God's power, force, or virtue, as in Job 33:4, *רוח אל עשתי* *the Spirit of God made me*, i.e., the virtue, or power of God, or, if you prefer, God's decree. For the Psalmist, speaking poetically, also says [in Psalms 33:6] *by the command of God were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the Spirit, or breath, of his mouth*, i.e., by his decree, pronounced as if in one breath. Similarly, in Psalms 139:7, *אנה אלך מרוחך ואנה מפניך אברה* *where shall I go (that I may be) outside your Spirit, or where shall I flee (that I may be) out of your sight*. That is (as is evident from the verses in which the Psalmist himself proceeds to amplify this), where can I go that I may be outside your power and presence?

[38] Finally, the Sacred Texts also use *רוח יהוה the Spirit of God* to express God's affects of the heart, such as his kindness and compassion, as in Micah 2:7, *הקצר רוח יהוה* *is the Spirit of God*, i.e., God's compassion, *restricted? are these (cruel) works his?* Similarly, in Zechariah 4:6, *לא בחיל* *not by arms, not by force, but only by my Spirit*, i.e., only by my compassion. And in this sense I think we must understand the same Prophet's 7:12, *שמעו שמעו את התורה ואת הדברים אשר* *and they made their hearts hard*,<sup>43</sup> *lest they should obey the Law and the commandments which God sent from his Spirit* (i.e., from his compassion) *through the first Prophets*. In this sense also Haggai says (2:5): *ורוחי עומדת בתוכם אל תיראו* *and my Spirit (or my grace) remains among you; fear not*.

[III/27] [39] As for Isaiah 48:16, where it is said *יהוה שלחני ורוחו* *but now the LORD God sent me, and his Spirit*, we can understand this to refer either to God's heart, and compassion, or to his mind, revealed in the Law. For Isaiah says: *from the beginning* (i.e., when I first came to you, to preach God's anger to you, and his judgment against you), *I have not spoken in secret, from the time [his judgment] was (pronounced), I was there* (as he himself attests in ch. 7), but now I am a joyful messenger,

42. Note that Spinoza here treats even attributing a mind to God as a form of anthropomorphism. Bennett observes that though few theologians would credit God with having breath or a body, "most would say God has or is a mind."

43. Following Akkerman, who reads *cautem* for *cautum*.

sent by God's compassion, to sing your restoration. Alternatively, as I have said, we can also understand [God's Spirit] to refer to God's mind, revealed in the Law, i.e., that he comes now to warn them, according to the command of the Law, viz. Leviticus 19:17. So he warns them in the same conditions and in the same way as Moses used to. And finally, as Moses also did, he ends by preaching their restoration. Nevertheless, the first explanation seems to me more harmonious.

[40] Let us come back, finally, to the point we have been aiming at. From all these [examples] these phrases of Scripture become clear: *the Spirit of God was in the Prophet, God infused his Spirit into men, men were filled with the Spirit of God, and with the Holy Spirit*, etc. For they mean nothing other than that the Prophets had a singular virtue, beyond what is ordinary,<sup>44\*\*</sup> that they cultivated piety with exceptional constancy of heart, and that they perceived God's mind, *or*, judgment. [41] For we have shown that in Hebrew Spirit means both the mind and its judgment, and that for this reason the Law itself, because it made known God's mind, could also be called God's Spirit *or* mind. That's why the imagination of the Prophets could, with equal right, also be called the mind of God, insofar as God's decrees were revealed through it, and the Prophets could be said to have had the mind of God. And although the mind of God and his eternal judgments are inscribed in our minds also, and consequently, we too perceive the mind of God (if I may speak with Scripture), nevertheless, because natural knowledge is common to all, men do not value it so highly, as we have already said.<sup>45</sup> This is particularly true of the Hebrews, who used to boast that they were superior to all others, indeed, who were accustomed to disdain all others, and hence, to disdain the 'knowledge common to all.

[42] Finally, the Prophets were said to have the Spirit of God because men were ignorant of the causes of Prophetic knowledge, were amazed by it, and on that account, were accustomed to refer it to God—as they did all other wonders—and to call it God's knowledge.

44. \*\*[ADN. III] Although certain men have certain things nature does not impart to others, nevertheless, they are not said to exceed human nature unless the things they have in this singular way are such that they cannot be perceived from the definition of human nature. E.g., the size of a giant is rare, but nevertheless human. To compose poems extemporaneously is given to very few, and nevertheless, it is human [Saint-Glaine: and some do it easily]. Similarly, some may, with their eyes open, imagine certain things so vividly that it's as if they had those things before them. But if there were someone who had another means of perceiving, and other foundations of knowledge, he would surely transcend the limits of human nature.

45. A reference to i, 2.

[43] We can now affirm, then, without any reservation, that the Prophets perceived God's revelations only with the aid of the imagination, i.e., by the mediation of words or of images; these [words and  
 5 images] may have been either true or imaginary.<sup>46</sup> For since we find no other means in Scripture except these, we're not permitted to feign any others, as we have already shown.

[44] By what laws of nature was this [revelation] made? I confess I don't know. I could say, as others do, that it was made by the power of God. But then it would look as though I was just babbling. That  
 10 would be like trying to explain the form of a singular thing by some transcendental term. For all things are made through the power of God. Indeed, because the power of Nature is just God's power itself,<sup>47</sup> insofar as we're ignorant of natural causes, we certainly don't understand God's power. So it's foolish to fall back on that power of God  
 15 when we don't know the natural cause of a thing, i.e., when we don't know God's power itself. But there's no need now for us to know the cause of Prophetic knowledge. For as I've already indicated, here we're just trying to learn what Scripture teaches, so that we can draw our conclusions from those teachings as we would draw conclusions from the data of nature.<sup>48</sup> We're not in the least concerned with the causes  
 20 of the teachings.

[45] Since the Prophets perceived God's revelations with the aid of the imagination, there is no doubt that they were able to perceive many things beyond the limits of the intellect. For we can compose many more ideas from words and images than we can by using only  
 25 the principles and notions on which our whole natural knowledge is constructed.

[46] So now it's clear why the Prophets perceived and taught almost everything in metaphors and enigmatic sayings, and expressed all spiritual things corporeally. For all these things agree more with the nature of the imagination. And now we won't wonder why Scripture and the  
 30 Prophets speak so improperly and obscurely concerning the Spirit of God, *or* his mind, as in Numbers 11:17 and 1 Kings 22:2,<sup>49</sup> or why Micaiah saw God sitting [on a throne, in 1 Kings 22:19], while Daniel

46. Cf. i, 9, and the annotation there.

47. A recurring and important theme in the TTP. Cf. iii, 9; vi, 9; and xvi, 3. ALM trace it to a passage in Pliny, *Natural History* II, v, 7. See also TP ii, 2.

48. Here Spinoza anticipates the fuller statement of his methodology which he will make in vii, 6–7.

49. So Gebhardt, ALM, and Glazemaker (among others) give the citation. But it's hard to see why 1 Kings 22:2 would be apt. ALM's annotation suggests (more plausibly) that Spinoza may have intended to refer to 1 Kings 22:20–23, where God is said to put a lying spirit into the mouths of Ahab's prophets (a passage Spinoza will cite in ii, 7–9).

saw him as an old man clothed in white garments [Daniel 7:9], and Ezekiel saw him as a fire;<sup>50</sup> or why those who were with Christ saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove,<sup>51</sup> but the Apostles saw it as fiery  
[III/29] tongues [Acts 2:3], and finally why Paul, when he was first converted, saw a great light [Acts 9:3]. For all these [visions] agree completely with the common ways of imagining God and Spirits.

[47] Finally, since the imagination is random and inconstant, [we also understand now why] Prophecy did not stay long with the Prophets, and also was not frequent, but very rare. I.e., it happened to very few  
5 men, and even to them, very rarely.

[48] As a result, we're now forced to ask how the Prophets could have come to be certain of things they perceived only through the imagination, and not from certain principles of the mind.<sup>52</sup> But whatever we can say about this, we must seek from Scripture. As we have already said, we do not have true 'knowledge of this matter, *or* we cannot  
10 explain it through its first causes. What Scripture teaches concerning the certainty of the Prophets, I shall show in the following chapter, where I have decided to treat of the Prophets.

[III/29]

## CHAPTER II

### *Of the Prophets*

[1] From the preceding chapter it follows (as we've already indicated) that the Prophets were not endowed with a more perfect mind, but rather with a power of imagining unusually vividly. The Scriptural narratives also teach this amply. It's clear that Solomon excelled all others in  
20 wisdom, but not in the gift of Prophecy. Similarly, those outstandingly wise men, Heman, Darda, and Calcol, were not Prophets. On the other hand, countryfolk, without any education, and even simple women, like Hagar, Abraham's handmaid, were granted the gift of Prophecy.<sup>1</sup> This

50. Cf. Ezek. 1:4. SC notes (regarding Ezekiel, xii) that Ezekiel's description of his vision in his first chapter provided a focal point for Jewish mysticism, "from its beginning down to the later study of the Kabbalah." See Maimonides *Guide* III, introduction through ch. vii.

51. In John 1:32 this vision is attributed to John the Baptist, but in Matt. 3:16, to Jesus himself.

52. Note that the doubt Spinoza raises here tends to undermine the chapter's starting point, which had defined prophecy as certain knowledge (i, 1).

1. Spinoza now makes his opposition to Maimonides more explicit. Cf. i, 9, and the annotation there. In 1 Kings 4:31 Solomon is said to have been wiser than all

25 also agrees with both experience and reason. For those who have the most powerful imaginations are less able to grasp things by pure intellect. On the other hand, those who have more powerful intellects, and who cultivate them most, have a more moderate power of imagining, and have it more under their 'power. They rein in their imagination, as it were, lest it be confused with the intellect.

[2] So those who eagerly search the Prophetic books for wisdom, and  
 30 knowledge of both natural and spiritual matters, go completely astray. Since the times, Philosophy and, finally, the subject itself demand it, I have decided to show this fully here. I care little for the snarls of  
 [III/30] the superstitious, who hate no one more than those who cultivate true 'knowledge and true life. Sadly, things have come to this: people who openly confess that they have no idea of God, and that they know God only through created things (whose causes they are ignorant of), do not blush to accuse Philosophers of Atheism.<sup>2</sup>

5 [3] To show, in an orderly way, [that the books of the Prophets are not a source of wisdom and the knowledge of spiritual and natural matters], I shall show that the Prophecies varied, not only with the imagination and bodily temperament of each Prophet, but also with the opinions they were steeped in. So Prophecy never made the Prophets more learned. Soon I shall explain this more fully; but first I must treat  
 10 the certainty of the Prophets, both because it concerns the theme of this chapter, but also because it will help in some measure to get to the conclusion we intend to demonstrate.

[4] Unlike a clear and distinct idea, a simple imagination does not, by its nature, involve certainty. So to be able to be certain of things we  
 15 imagine, we must add something to the imagination—viz., reasoning.<sup>3</sup> It follows that, by itself, Prophecy cannot involve certainty. As we've

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other men (including Heman, Darda, and Kalchol). One matter of dispute is whether Hagar was really a prophet. Maimonides denied it (*Guide* II, 42). But though the two versions of the story of her expulsion (in Gen. 16:1–16 and 21:8–21) differ in numerous details, both agree that an angel spoke to her and revealed that her offspring would flourish.

2. Spinoza may have in mind the controversies over the Cartesian philosophy at Utrecht and Leiden in the 1640s, where Descartes was accused of atheism, partly because he rejected the traditional arguments for God's existence, and sought to prove God's existence from our idea of God, an idea the critics thought we could not have. On this see Verbeek 1992. But the accusation was of course one which Spinoza himself had to face. Cf. Letter 42, IV/218/32–34.

3. What reasoning must be added, if an imagination is to become certain? The *Treatise on the Intellect* suggests that it is an understanding of the nature of the imagination and the laws of nature involved in causing us to perceive things the way we do. Cf. TdIE, 102–3; TTP i, 44, 48 and v, 35; and Curley 1973. The signs which Spinoza says the prophets had would not provide that understanding, and so would not yield more than a subjective feeling of certainty, not objective certainty.

shown, it depended only on the imagination. So the Prophets were not certain about God's revelation by the revelation itself, but by some sign.

20 Genesis 15:8—where Abraham asked for a sign after he had heard God's promise—makes this evident. He trusted God, of course, and did not ask for a sign so as to have faith in God. He asked for a sign to know that it was God who had made this promise to him.

[5] Judges 6:17 establishes the same point even more clearly. There Gideon says to God, עמי ועשית לי אות שאתה מדבר עמי *make a sign for me* 25 (that I may know) *that you are speaking with me*. Also [in Exodus 3:12] God says to Moses, וזה לך האות כי אנכי שלחתיך *and (let) this (be) a sign to you, that I sent you*. And Hezekiah, who had known for some time that Isaiah was a Prophet, asked for a sign of the Prophecy predicting his [return to] health [Isaiah 38:1–8]. This shows that the Prophets 30 always had some sign by which they became certain of the things they imagined Prophetically. That's why Moses warns [the Jews] to seek a sign from [anyone claiming to be] a Prophet, viz. the outcome of some future event (Deuteronomy 18:22). [6] In this respect, then, Prophecy is inferior to natural knowledge, which needs no sign, but of its own nature involves certainty.

Indeed, this Prophetic certainty was not mathematical, but only [III/31] moral, as is evident from Scripture itself. For in Deuteronomy 13[:2] Moses warns that any Prophet who wants to teach new Gods should be condemned to death, even though he confirms his teaching with signs and miracles. For as Moses himself goes on to say, God also uses 5 signs and miracles to test the people. [7] And Christ too gave this same warning to his Disciples, as Matthew 24:24 shows.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Ezekiel clearly teaches (14:9) that God sometimes deceives men with false revelations.<sup>5</sup> For he says, והנביא כי יפותה ודבר דבר אני יהיה פתיתי את הנביא ההוא *and when a Prophet (i.e., a false one) is led astray and has spoken a word,* 10 *it is I, God, who have led that Prophet astray*. Micaiah also testifies to this concerning the Prophets of Ahab (see 1 Kings 22:23).

[8] Although this seems to show that Prophecy and revelation are very doubtful, still, they do, as we have said, have a great deal of certainty. 15 For God never deceives the pious and the elect, but as that ancient proverb says,<sup>6</sup> and as the story of Abigail and her speech show, God

4. In the passage cited Jesus warns that false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, "to lead astray, if possible, even the elect."

5. Cf. Descartes, the Second and Sixth Replies (AT 1974–86, VII, 125–26, 142–44, 415–16, 428–31).

6. Spinoza refers, without quoting it, to a proverb cited in 1 Sam. 24:13: "Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness, but my hand shall not be against you." Abigail's speech is in 1 Sam. 25:24–31.



uses the pious as instruments of his piety, and the impious as executors  
 20 and means of his anger. [9] The case of Micaiah, which we have just  
 cited, also establishes this most clearly. For although God had decided  
 to deceive Ahab through Prophets, nevertheless he used only false  
 Prophets. To the pious [Prophet] he revealed the thing as it was, and  
 he did not prohibit him from predicting the truth.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, as I have said, the Prophet's certainty was only moral,  
 because no one can justify himself before God, or boast that he is the  
 25 instrument of God's piety. Scripture teaches this, and the thing itself  
 is plain. For God's anger seduced David into numbering the people,  
 though Scripture testifies abundantly to his piety.<sup>8</sup>

[10] The whole of Prophetic certainty, therefore, is founded on  
 these three things:

- 1) That the Prophets imagined the things revealed to them very vividly, in  
 the way we are usually affected by objects when we are awake;
- 30 2) That there was a Sign;
- 3) And finally—this is the chief thing—that they had a heart inclined only  
 to the right and the good.

And although Scripture does not always mention a Sign, still, we  
 must believe that the Prophets always had a Sign. For as many have  
 previously noted, Scripture is not in the habit of always narrating all  
 the conditions and circumstances; instead, it sometimes presupposes  
 that they are known.

[III/32] [11] Furthermore, we can concede that the Prophets who prophesied  
 nothing new, but only what was contained in the Law of Moses, did  
 not need a sign, because they were confirmed by the Law. E.g., the

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7. First Micaiah prophesies success, but then, under pressure from Ahab to tell the truth, he prophesies failure. Cf. 1 Kings 22:13–18, 2 Chron. 18:12–17.

8. Spinoza is referring, in the first instance, to 2 Sam. 24:1, according to which God, in his anger against the people of Israel, incited David to count them. It is unclear why numbering the people was a sin. Manasseh 1842/1972, I, 194–98, canvasses several theories, among them the theory that in failing to count the people by collecting half a shekel from each man (cf. Exod. 30:12–13), David risked bringing the Evil Eye upon them. Manasseh accepts the reality of the Evil Eye, but does not think David's failure to follow Exodus's prescription explained why his act was sinful.

In any event, David acknowledged having sinned greatly, and the people of Israel were accordingly punished with a pestilence in which seventy thousand people died. Discomfort about this passage seems to go back to biblical times. 1 Chron. 21:1 makes Satan the one who incited David's sin (perhaps, as HCSB suggests, because the Chronicler is reluctant to make God the author of a sin he proceeds to punish).

David's piety is attested in 1 Kings 14:8, 15:5, and 11, though 15:5 takes notice of his (many) shortcomings. Manasseh 1842/1972, II, 63–65, provides an interesting account of the medieval debates about David's character.



Prophecy of Jeremiah concerning the destruction of Jerusalem was confirmed by the Prophecies of the rest of the prophets, and by the threats of the Law. So it did not need a sign. But Hananiah, contrary to all the Prophets, prophesied a speedy restoration of the city. So he needed a sign. Without one he would have had to doubt his Prophecy until the occurrence of the thing he predicted confirmed his Prophecy. See Jeremiah 28:9.<sup>9</sup>

[12] Because the certainty the Prophets had from signs was not mathematical—i.e., a certainty which follows from the necessity of the perception of the thing perceived or seen—but only moral, and the signs were given only to persuade the Prophet, it follows that the signs were given according to the opinions and capacity of the Prophet. So a sign which would render one Prophet certain of his Prophecy could not at all convince another, who was steeped in different opinions. That's why the signs varied in each Prophet.

[13] Similarly, the revelation itself varied in each Prophet, as we have said [ii, 3], according to the disposition of his bodily temperament, according to the disposition of his imagination, and according to the opinions he had previously embraced.

First, the revelation varied according to his temperament in this way: if the Prophet was cheerful, what was revealed to him were victories, peace, and the things which move men to joy; for such men usually imagine these things more frequently. On the other hand, if the Prophet was sad, wars, punishments, and all kinds of evil were revealed to him. And as the Prophet was compassionate, calm, prone to anger, severe, etc., he was more ready for one kind of revelation than for another.<sup>10</sup>

[14] Secondly, the revelation varied according to the disposition of his imagination: if the Prophet was refined, he perceived the mind of God in a refined style; if he was confused, he perceived it confusedly. It varied similarly in the revelations represented through images. If the Prophet was a rustic, bulls, cows, and the like, were represented to him; if he was a soldier, generals and armies; if he was a courtier, the royal throne and things of that kind.<sup>11</sup>

[15] Finally, Prophecy varied according to differences in the opinions of the Prophets. To the Magi, who believed in the trifles of astrology, Christ's birth was revealed through the imagination of a star rising in the east (see Matthew 2). To Nebuchadnezzar's soothsayers the

9. Jeremiah's point, however, seems to be somewhat different from the one Spinoza suggests, viz. that the prophet who prophesies an outcome his hearers desire can be known to be a prophet only after his predictions have been realized.

10. This point is developed further in ii, 16–18.

11. This point is developed further in ii, 19–23.

destruction of Jerusalem was revealed in the entrails of animals (see Ezekiel 21:26).<sup>12</sup> That King also understood this from oracles and from the direction of arrows he hurled up in the air. Again, to Prophets who  
 5 believed that men act from free choice and from their own power, God was revealed as indifferent, and as unaware of future human actions. We shall demonstrate all these things separately from Scripture itself.<sup>13</sup>

[16] The case of Elisha (in 2 Kings 3:15) establishes the first point. He asked for an instrument to prophesy to Jehoram; he could not perceive  
 10 God's mind until its music had charmed him.<sup>14</sup> Then, finally, he predicted joyful things to Jehoram and his companions. This couldn't happen earlier, because he was angry with the King—those who are angry with someone are ready to imagine evils, but not goods, concerning them.

[17] Some say that God is not revealed to those who are angry or sad.<sup>15</sup>  
 15 They are surely dreaming. For God revealed that wretched slaughter of the first-born to Moses when he was angry at Pharaoh (see Exodus 11:8), without using any musical instrument to do it. Again, God was revealed to Cain when he was in a rage [Genesis 4:6], and the wretchedness and stubbornness of the Jews were revealed to Ezekiel when he was angry and impatient (see Ezekiel 3:14). Jeremiah prophesied the  
 20 Jews' calamities when he was very mournful and weary of life. That's why Josiah did not want to consult him, but instead asked a woman of that time, expecting, from the female mentality, that she would be more ready to reveal God's mercy to him (see 2 Chronicles 34[:22–28]).<sup>16</sup>

[18] Also, Micaiah never prophesied anything good to Ahab, though  
 25 other true Prophets did (as is evident from 1 Kings 20[:13]). But his whole life he prophesied evils (see 1 Kings 22:8, and more clearly, 2 Chronicles 18:7). The Prophets, therefore, were more ready for one kind of revelation than another, according to the variations in their bodily temperament.

[19] As for the second point, the style of the prophecy varied according to the articulateness of each Prophet. For unlike the Prophecies  
 30 of Isaiah and Nahum, those of Ezekiel and Amos are written, not in a refined, but in a more unsophisticated style.<sup>17</sup> And if anyone who is

12. In some translations (e.g., the NRSV) the relevant passage appears in verse 21:21. In others (e.g., the NJPS translation) it's in verse 26.

13. Since Spinoza regards this point as especially important, he devotes several pages to arguing for it, beginning in ii, 24, and extending to ii, 52.

14. HCSB cites 1 Sam. 10:5–6 to show that "Prophets sometimes used music to induce trance or possession by God's spirit."

15. Cf. Maimonides *Guide* II, xxxvi, which cites the Talmud (Shabbath 30b) in favor of this position.

16. Spinoza's explanation of Josiah's consultation of Huldah may have been suggested by that offered in the Talmud (Meg. 14b).

17. A point acknowledged in Calvin, *Institutes* I, viii, 2 (Gebhardt V, 16).

skilled in the Hebrew language wants to examine these matters more carefully, let him compare certain chapters of the different Prophets with one another when they are dealing with the same subject; he will find a great difference in style.

- Let him compare, for example, ch. 1 of the courtier, Isaiah, from vs. [III/34] 11 to vs. 20, with ch. 5 of the rustic Amos, from vs. 21 to vs. 24. Let him compare, next, the order and reasons of the Prophecy of Jeremiah which he wrote against Edom in ch. 49 [vv. 7–22] with the order and reasons of Obadiah [vv. 1–16]. Let him compare also Isaiah 40:19–20  
 5 and 44:8ff. with Hosea 8:6 and 13:2. And similarly with the others. If you weigh all these things rightly, you will easily see that God has no distinctive style of speaking, but that he is refined, succinct, and severe, unsophisticated, wordy, and obscure, according to the learning and capacity of the Prophet.
- 10 [20] Even when the Prophetic representations and symbols signified the same thing, they still varied. For to Isaiah the glory of God leaving the temple was represented differently than it was to Ezekiel [cf. Isaiah 6 with Ezekiel 1]. The Rabbis maintain that each representation was entirely the same, but that Ezekiel, being a rustic, was struck beyond  
 15 measure with wonder, and therefore described it fully, with all the circumstances.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, if they didn't have a certain tradition in support of this—which I don't for a moment believe—they are making the whole thing up. For Isaiah saw Seraphim with six wings, while Ezekiel saw beasts with four wings. Isaiah saw God clothed and sitting on a royal throne, while Ezekiel saw him as like a fire. There is no doubt that each of them saw God as he was accustomed to imagine him.
- 20 [21] Moreover, the representations varied not only in their manner, but also in their clarity. For Zechariah's representations were too obscure for him to understand them without explanation, as is evident from his account of them [Zechariah 1:9]. And even after Daniel's representations had been explained to him, the Prophet himself could  
 25 not understand them [Daniel 8:15–27]. This did not happen because of the difficulty of what was to be revealed—for it was only a matter of human affairs, which do not exceed the limits of human capacity, except insofar as they are future—but only because Daniel's imagination did not have the same aptitude for prophesying while he was awake as it had while he was dreaming. This is evident from the fact  
 30 that at the very beginning of the revelation he was so terrified that he almost despaired of his powers. So because of the weakness of his

18. Spinoza refers here to a passage in the Talmud (Hagigah 13b), discussed (but not unequivocally endorsed) by Maimonides *Guide* III, 6.

imagination and of his powers, the things represented to him were very obscure, and he could not understand them even after they had been explained to him.

[22] Here it should be noted that the words Daniel heard (as we have shown above)<sup>19</sup> were only imaginary. So it is no wonder that, being upset  
[III/35] at that time, he imagined all those words so confusedly and obscurely that afterward he could not understand anything from them. Some say that God did not want to reveal the thing clearly to Daniel. But they seem not to have read the words of the Angel, who says expressly (see  
5 10:14) *that he came to make Daniel understand what would happen to his people in the end of days*. So these things remained obscure because at that time no one was found who had enough power of imagination that they could be revealed to him more clearly.

[23] Finally, the Prophets to whom it was revealed that God would take Elijah up [into heaven] wanted to persuade Elisha that he had  
10 been brought down in another place, where they could still find him [2 Kings 2:16]. This clearly shows that they had not understood God's revelation properly.

There is no need to show these things more fully. For nothing is more clearly established in Scripture than that God endowed some Prophets with far more grace for prophesying than he did others.

[24] [As for the third point] I shall now show more carefully and in greater detail—for I think the matter is of great importance—that  
15 the Prophecies *or* representations also varied according to the opinions the Prophets embraced, and that the Prophets had various, and indeed, contrary, opinions, as well as various prejudices. (I'm speaking here only about purely speculative matters, for we must think quite differently about matters which concern integrity and morals.) From  
20 these propositions I shall conclude that Prophecy never rendered the Prophets more learned, but left them with their preconceived opinions, that for that reason we are not at all bound to believe them concerning purely speculative matters.

[25] With astonishing rashness everyone has persuaded himself that the Prophets knew everything the human intellect can attain to. And although certain passages of Scripture indicate to us as clearly as possible  
25 that the Prophets were ignorant of certain things, they prefer to say that they do not understand Scripture in those passages, rather than concede that the Prophets were ignorant of anything. Or else they try to twist the words of Scripture so that it says what it plainly does not

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19. See i, 10–22, where Spinoza argues that only when God communicated the law to Moses did he use a true voice.

30 mean. Of course, if either of these [ways of dealing with Scripture] is permissible, the whole of Scripture is undone. If it is permissible to number the clearest passages among those which are obscure and impenetrable, or to interpret them as one pleases, we will strive in vain to show something from Scripture.<sup>20</sup>

[26] For example, nothing in Scripture is clearer than that Joshua, and perhaps also the author who wrote his story, thought that the sun  
[III/36] moves around the earth, that the earth is at rest, and that for some period of time the sun stood still.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, there are many who do not want to concede that there can be any change in the heavens, and who therefore explain this passage so that it doesn't seem to say anything like that. Others, who have learned to philosophize more correctly, since they understand that the earth moves, whereas the sun is at rest, *or* does not move around the earth, strive with all their powers to twist the same [truth] out of Scripture, though it cries out in open protest against this treatment. They truly amaze me!

[27] Are we, I ask, bound to believe that Joshua, a soldier, was skilled in Astronomy? and that the miracle could not be revealed to him, or  
10 that the light of the sun could not remain longer than usual above the horizon, unless Joshua understood the cause? Both alternatives seem to me ridiculous. I prefer, then, to say openly that Joshua did not know the true cause of the greater duration of that light, that he and the whole crowd who were present all thought that the sun moves with a  
15 daily motion around the earth, and that on that day it stood still for a while. They believed this to be the cause of the greater duration of that light and they did not consider that a refraction greater than usual could arise from the large amount of ice then in that part of the air (see Joshua 10:11)—or from some other cause. We are not now concerned to ask what the true cause was.

[28] Similarly, the sign of the backward motion of the shadow was  
20 revealed to Isaiah according to his power of understanding, viz. as a backward motion of the sun [cf. 2 Kings 20:8–12 with Isaiah 38:7–8]. For he too thought that the sun moves and that the earth is at rest. As luck would have it, he never thought of parhelia,<sup>22</sup> not even in a dream. We are permitted to maintain this without any hesitation because the

20. The target here is the kind of rationalistic interpretation Spinoza associates with Maimonides. He will return to this critique in vii, 75ff.

21. Cf. Josh. 10:12–14. Note the distinction Spinoza makes between Joshua and the author of the book of Joshua, anticipating a claim he will not argue for until viii, 34–38.

22. A parhelia is a bright spot in the sky caused by the reflection of sunlight on ice crystals in the atmosphere. Descartes offered an explanation of them in the final chapter of his *Météores* (AT 1974–86, VI, 354–66) and Huygens also wrote a treatise on them, *De coronis et parheliis*.

sign could really happen, and be predicted to the king by Isaiah, even though the Prophet did not know its true cause.

- 25 [29] We must also say the same about Solomon's building the temple (if, indeed, God revealed that to him), viz., that all his measures were revealed to him according to his power of understanding and opinions. Because we are not bound to believe that Solomon was a Mathematician, we are allowed to affirm that he did not know the ratio between the circumference of a circle and its diameter, and that he thought,  
30 like ordinary workmen, that it is 3 to 1. But if it's permitted to say that we do not understand that text—1 Kings 7:23—then I certainly don't know what we can understand from Scripture. For the building is narrated there simply and purely historically.

- [III/37] [30] If we're allowed to suppose that Scripture thought otherwise, but for some reason unknown to us wished to write in this way, this will completely overturn the whole of Scripture. Everyone will be able, with equal right, to say the same thing about every passage in Scripture.  
5 It will be permissible to perpetrate and defend, without harm to the authority of Scripture, whatever absurdity, whatever evil, human malice can think up. But what we've maintained contains no impiety. For though Solomon, Isaiah, Joshua and the rest were Prophets, they were still men, and nothing human should be thought alien to them.<sup>23</sup>

- [31] It was also according to Noah's power of understanding that it was revealed to him that God was destroying the human race [Genesis  
10 6:11–13]. He thought the earth was not inhabited outside of Palestine. There's also no impiety in supposing that the Prophets could be ignorant, not just of things of this kind, but of other more important things. They really were ignorant of these things. For they taught nothing remarkable about the divine attributes, but had quite ordinary opinions about God, to which their revelations were accommodated.

- 15 I shall now show this by many testimonies from Scripture. From this you will easily see that the Prophets are praised, and so greatly commended, not for the loftiness and excellence of their understanding, but for their piety and constancy of heart.

- [32] Adam, the first to whom God was revealed, did not know that  
20 God is omnipresent and omniscient. For he hid himself from God [Genesis 3:8] and sought to excuse his sin in God's presence, as if he had a man before him. So God was revealed to him also according to his power of understanding, as one who is not everywhere and who was unaware of Adam's location and sin. For he heard, or he seemed  
25 to hear, God walking through the garden, and calling him, and asking

23. Alluding to Terence's *Heautontimorumenos*, 77. Cf. Letter 13, and TTP Pref. 35.

where he was; and when he showed his sense of shame, [he seemed to hear God] asking him whether he had eaten of the forbidden tree.<sup>24</sup> So Adam did not know any other attribute of God than that he was the maker of all things.

[33] To Cain also God was revealed according to his power of understanding, i.e., as unaware of human affairs [Genesis 4:9]. For there was no need for him to have a loftier knowledge of God in order to repent of his sin.

To Laban God revealed himself as the God of Abraham, because Laban believed that each nation has its own special God. See Genesis 31:29.

[34] Abraham, too, did not know that God is everywhere and that he foreknows all things. For when he heard the judgment against the [III/38] Sodomites, he begged God not to carry it out before he knew whether they all deserved that punishment. So in Genesis 18:24 he says: *אולי יש חמשים צדיקים בתוך העיר perhaps fifty just men are found in that city*. And God was not revealed to him differently. For in Abraham's imagination [5] [God] speaks thus: *נא ואראה הכצעקתה הבאה אלי עשו כלה ואם לא אדעה now I shall go down to see whether they have done as the great complaint which has come to me says; if not, I shall know it* [Genesis 18:21]. Also, the divine testimony concerning Abraham (see Genesis 18:19) contains nothing beyond his obedience, and that he recommended the right [10] and the good to his household; it does not say he had lofty thoughts about God.

[35] Even Moses did not perceive clearly enough that God is omniscient and that all human actions are directed by his decree alone. For though God had told him (see Exodus 3:18) that the Israelites would [15] obey him, he still questioned this, and replied (see Exodus 4:1): *והן לא יאמינו לי ולא ישמעו לקולי what if they do not believe me and do not obey me?*<sup>25</sup> And thus God was revealed to him as indifferent and unaware of future human actions. For he gave him two signs and said (Exodus 4:8): *if it should happen that they do not believe the first sign, still, they will believe [20] the last; but if they do not believe even the last, take (then) some water from the river etc.*

[36] If anyone is willing to assess Moses' opinions carefully and without prejudice, he will find clearly that his opinion of God was that

24. The anthropomorphism of these passages naturally attracted the attention of the classical commentators. Rashi (1960) dealt with the questions God asks in Gen. 3:9 by saying "he knew where [Adam] was, but He asked this in order to open up a conversation with him, that he should not become confused in his reply, if He were to pronounce punishment against him all of a sudden." Similarly for God's questions to Cain at Gen. 4:9 and to Balaam at Num. 22:9. Ibn Ezra 1988 offers the same solution.

25. Spinoza's Hebrew text departs from MT here.



he is a being who exists, has always existed, and always will exist. For this reason he calls him by the name יהוה *Yahweh*, which in Hebrew  
 25 expresses these three times of existing.<sup>26</sup> But concerning his nature he teaches nothing except that he is compassionate, kind, etc., and supremely jealous.<sup>27</sup> This is established by a great many passages in the Pentateuch. Next, he believed and taught that this being differs so from all other beings that it cannot be expressed by any image of  
 30 anything seen, nor can it even be seen—not so much because the thing involves a contradiction as because of human weakness.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, he also taught that by reason of his power he is singular or unique.

[37] Moses conceded, of course, that there are beings which—doubtless from God's order and command—are God's agents, i.e., beings to whom God has given the authority, right and power to direct nations,  
 [III/39] to provide for them and to care for them. But he taught that this being, whom [the Jews] were bound to worship, was the highest and supreme God, *or* (to use a Hebrew phrase) the God of Gods.<sup>29</sup> So in the song of Exodus (15:11) he said: יהוה כמוכי באלים יהוה *who among the Gods is like you, Yahweh?* And Jethro [says] (in Exodus 18:11): עתה ידעתי כי גדול יהוה מכל *עתה ידעתי כי גדול יהוה מכל*  
 5 *now I know that Yahweh is greater than all the Gods*, i.e., at last I

26. Spinoza takes the divine name to be derived from the verbal root *hayah*, *he is*, which, depending on pointing, prefixes, and context, can refer to past, present, or future existence. This interpretation stems from Exod. 3:14, which has been variously translated: *I am that I am* (KJV), *I am who I am* (RSV, NRSV), *I am what I am* (RSV, NRSV alt), *I will be what I will be* (RSV, NRSV alt). This passage has occasioned much discussion, on which see Childs 1974. Spinoza will return to the subject of the divine name in xiii, 10ff., where he will take Exod. 6:3 as his text.

27. At Deut. 4:24, Moses says of God that he is “a devouring fire, a jealous God.” HCSB comments that this combination of epithets expresses “the vehement passion of the Lord’s self-defense against idolatry and other acts of profanation.” Rashi 1960 offered a similar gloss on the use of this language in the Decalogue. (See SC at Exod. 20:5.)

28. That is, it is not (according to Moses) intrinsically impossible for God to be seen; it is only impossible for man to see God and survive the experience. Cf. Exod. 33:20–23, and in the TTP, i, 17–18; ii, 42–43; vii, 19.

29. Cf. Deut. 10:17. Mosaic theology, as Spinoza presents it, is a form of what is sometimes called monolatry: it acknowledges the existence of many gods, but calls upon the people of Israel to worship only one, who is represented as superior to the others and particularly concerned with the people of Israel. It appears that Moses may not have conceived these other gods as created by Yahweh, and some passages suggest that the worship of the other gods was thought appropriate for the inhabitants of other lands.

Though Spinoza’s reading of the Hebrew Bible is common today, it seems to have been unusual in Spinoza’s day. Maimonides interpreted language like *Elohim of the Elohim* to mean “deity of the angels” (*Guide* II, 6). Medieval commentators like Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Nachmanides all followed him, as did Manasseh 1842/1972, qu. 188, commenting on Ps. 95:3. Older translations also often followed this interpretation (e.g., both the older and the more recent JPS translations). For more recent discussions, see Freedman 1987, Scullion 1992, and the annotation to Exod. 15:11 in HCSB, which cites Exod. 12:12, among other passages, as illustrating that other gods are assumed to exist, even though they prove powerless in a contest with Yahweh.



am forced to concede to Moses that Yahweh is greater than all the Gods and uniquely powerful. But it can be doubted whether Moses believed that these beings who act as God's agents were created by God. As far as we know, he never said anything about their creation and beginning.

10 [38] In addition, he taught that this being [God] brought this visible world out of Chaos into order (see Genesis 1:2), that he put seeds in nature, and that therefore, he has the highest right and the highest power over all things,<sup>30</sup> and (see Deuteronomy 10:14–15) that in accordance with this highest right and power he chose, for himself alone, the  
15 Hebrew nation and a certain region of the world (see Deuteronomy 4:19, 32:8–9), but that he left the other nations and regions to the care of the other Gods which he put in his place. That's why he was called the God of Israel and of Jerusalem (see 2 Chronicles 32:19), while the other Gods were called the Gods of the other nations.

20 [39] And that's why the Jews believed that the region God chose for himself required a special worship of God, completely different from that of other regions—indeed that it could not permit the worship of other Gods, which was proper<sup>31</sup> to other regions. They believed the peoples the king of Assyria brought into the lands of the Jews were torn to pieces by lions because they did not know the worship of the  
25 Gods of that land. (See 2 Kings 17:25, 26, etc.) [40] According to Ibn Ezra,<sup>32</sup> that's why, when Jacob wanted to seek a homeland, he told his sons to prepare themselves for a new worship, and to put aside the alien Gods, i.e., the worship of the Gods of the land where they then were. (See Genesis 35:2–3.) Also when David wanted to tell Saul that  
30 his persecution of him was forcing him to live outside his native land, he said that he was driven out of God's inheritance and sent to worship other Gods. (See 1 Samuel 26:19.)

[41] Finally, [Moses] believed that this being, *or* God, had his dwelling place in the heavens (see Deuteronomy 33:27),<sup>33</sup> an opinion which was very common among the Gentiles.

[III/40] If we attend now to Moses' revelations, we find that they were accommodated to these opinions. For because he believed that God's nature admits of all the conditions we have mentioned, compassion, kindness, etc., God was revealed to him according to this opinion and under

30. Note that Spinoza does not describe God's creative activity in a way which suggests creation out of nothing. Cf. CM II, x.

31. *proprium*, which can mean either "peculiar" or "appropriate."

32. Gebhardt V, 20, identifies the passage in Ibn Ezra as occurring in his commentary on Genesis 31:16 (Ibn Ezra 1988, V, 228).

33. Deut. 33:26 would be more accurate.

these attributes. (See Exodus 34:6–7, which tells how God appeared to Moses, and vss. 4–5 of the Decalogue [in Exodus 20].)

[42] Next, [Exodus] 33:18[–23] relates that Moses asked God to be allowed to see him. But since (as has already been said) Moses had not formed any image of God in his brain, and since (as I’ve already shown) God is revealed to the Prophets only according to the disposition of their imagination, God did not appear to him in any image.<sup>34</sup> I say that this happened because it was inconsistent with Moses’s imagination.<sup>35</sup> For other Prophets testify that they saw God, viz. Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, etc. [43] And for this reason God replied to Moses, *לא תוכל לראות את פני* *you will not be able to see my face* [Exodus 33:20]. And because Moses believed that God is visible, i.e., that it implies no contradiction in the divine nature [for God to be seen]—for otherwise he would not have asked anything like that—[God] adds, *כי לא יראני האדם וחי* *since no one shall see me and live*. So he gives Moses a reason consistent with Moses’ own opinion. For he does not say that it involves a contradiction on the part of the divine nature [for God to be seen], as in fact it does, but that it cannot happen because of human weakness.

[44] Next, to reveal to Moses that because the Israelites had worshipped the calf, they had become like the other nations, God says (Exodus 33:2–3) that he will send an angel, i.e., a being which would take care of the Israelites in place of the supreme being, but that he does not wish to be among them. For this way left Moses nothing to show him that the Israelites were dearer to God than the other nations, which God also gave over to the care of other beings, *or* angels. This is shown by Exodus 33:16.

[45] Finally, because God was believed to live in the heavens, he was revealed as descending from heaven to the top of a mountain. Moses also went up the mountain to speak with God. This would not have been necessary at all, if he could, with equal ease, imagine God to be everywhere.

Even though God was revealed to the Israelites, they knew almost nothing about him. They showed this abundantly when, after a few days, they gave to a calf the honor and worship due to God, and believed that the calf was the Gods which had brought them out of Egypt. [See [III/41] Exodus 32:4.] [46] And certainly it is not credible that uneducated men,

34. The claim that God didn’t appear to Moses by any image seems contrary to i, 18 and 21.

35. Manasseh, commenting on Exod. 24:11, reports it as the opinion of “the Sages of the Talmud” that “Moses did not make use of imagination in his prophecies, but that his intellectual powers were divested of all corporeal affections” (1842/1972, I, 187). Cf. Maimonides *Guide* II, 35–36.

accustomed to the superstitions of the Egyptians, and worn out by the most wretched bondage, would have understood anything sensible about God, or that Moses would have taught them anything other than a way of living—and that not as a Philosopher, so that they might eventually live well from freedom of mind, but as a Legislator, so that they were  
 5 constrained to live well by the command of the Law.

[47] So the principle of living well, *or* the true life, and the worship and love of God, were to them more bondage than true freedom, and the grace and gift of God. For he commanded them to love God and to keep his law, that they might acknowledge the goods they had received from God, such as their freedom from bondage in Egypt. Next he terrified them  
 10 with threats, if they transgressed those commands, and he promised them many goods if they respected them. So he taught them in the same way parents usually do children who are lacking in all reason.<sup>36</sup> Hence, it is certain that they did not know the excellence of virtue and true blessedness.

[48] Jonah thought he could flee from God's sight [Jonah 1:3]. This  
 15 seems to show that he too believed that God had entrusted the care of the regions outside Judaea to other powers, whom he had assigned to act for him.

There is no one in the Old Testament who spoke about God more rationally than Solomon, who surpassed everyone in his age in the natural light. That's why he also thought himself above the Law—for  
 20 it was imparted only to those who lack reason and the teachings of the natural intellect. All the laws concerning the king (there were chiefly three of these; see Deuteronomy 17:16–17), he regarded as of little importance; indeed, he clearly violated them.<sup>37</sup> In doing this, however, he erred, and by indulging in sensual pleasures he acted in a way  
 25 unworthy of a Philosopher. He taught that all the goods of fortune are hollow for mortals (see Ecclesiastes), that men have nothing more excellent than the intellect, and that there is no greater punishment for them than folly (see Proverbs 16:22).<sup>38</sup>

[49] But let us return to the Prophets, whose differences of opinion  
 30 we have undertaken to note. The Rabbis who left us those books of

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36. Gebhardt V, 20, compares this with similar passages in Maimonides (*Guide* III, 32) and Calvin (*Institutes* II, xi, 13).

37. 1 Kings combines high praise for Solomon (in 10:23–24) with sharp criticism (in 11:1–13).

38. On the authorship of Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, see the notes at x, 5, and xix, 8. Perhaps Spinoza oversimplifies the teaching of Ecclesiastes. It's true that its author expresses contempt for the goods of fortune in passages like 6:1–6; but sometimes he includes wisdom and knowledge among the things he finds vain—e.g., in 1:16–18, a passage Spinoza quotes in the *Éthics* (IV P17S). Manasseh's discussion of the *prima facie* contradictions in Ecclesiastes (1842/1972, II, 299–324) deserves attention.

the Prophets now extant found the opinions of Ezekiel so inconsistent with those of Moses that—as we are told in the treatise on the Sabbath (ch. I, 13b)—they almost decided not to admit his book among the canonical ones,<sup>39</sup> and would have completely hidden it if a certain Hananias had not taken it upon himself to explain it. They say (as the [III/42] story goes there) that he finally did this, with great labor and zeal. But it isn't clear enough how he did it. Did he write a commentary, which is now, by chance, lost? Or was he so bold that he changed the very words and utterances of Ezekiel and arranged them according to his own mentality? Whatever he did, Chapter 18, at least, does not seem  
5 to agree with Exodus 34:7 or with Jeremiah 32:18, etc.<sup>40</sup>

[50] Samuel believed that when God has decreed something, he never repents of his decree (see 1 Samuel 15:29), for when Saul to repenting of his sin, wanted to worship God, and to ask forgiveness of him, he said to him that God would not change his decree against him. To  
10 Jeremiah, on the other hand, it was revealed (18:8–10) that whether God has decreed some harm or some good to a nation, he may repent of his decree, provided that men also, from the time of his judgment, change for better or for worse. But Joel taught that God repents only of harm (see 2:13).

[51] Finally, Genesis 4:7 shows most clearly that man can overcome  
15 the temptations of sin and act well. For this is said to Cain, who, however, never overcame them. Both Scripture and Josephus establish this.<sup>41</sup> The same thing may also be inferred most clearly from the chapter of Jeremiah just mentioned. For it says that God may repent of a decree

39. Arguably Spinoza has misunderstood the passage from the Talmud which he cites. Shabbath 13b reports that: “R. Judah (250–290) said in Rab’s (220–250) name: In truth, that man Hananiah, son of Hezekiah (early first century) by name, is to be remembered with blessing; but for him the book of Ezekiel would have been withdrawn, for its words contradicted the Torah. What did he do? Three hundred barrels of oil were taken up to him, and he sat in an upper chamber and reconciled the contradictions.” I follow the translation given in Leiman 1976, 72. Leiman argues that the term here translated *withdraw*, יָצָא, does not imply a denial of canonical status, but only a withdrawal of the book from circulation, on the ground that it contains problematic material, including material which could encourage heretical ideas (p. 79). Cf. X, 43–47.

40. The reference is evidently to Ezek. 18:14–20, which denies that the sins of the fathers will be visited upon their children. Manasseh, commenting on the apparent inconsistency between this verse and Exod. 20:5, observes that “Not only do these verses appear to contradict each other, but on a proper examination of sacred history, it will be found that there are many opposite statements on this point” (1842/1972, I, 164). He canvasses a number of different solutions and claims that the texts can be reconciled by any of them.

The fact that a *prima facie* inconsistency has been left standing does not seem consistent with Spinoza’s suggestion that Hananiah may have secured Ezekiel a place in the canon by altering his text to make it consistent with the teachings of the other prophets.

41. The reference is to Josephus, *Antiquities* I, ii, 2.

issued for the harm or good of men, depending on whether men are  
 20 willing to change their practices and way of living. On the other hand,  
 Paul teaches nothing more expressly than that men have no control  
 over the temptations of the flesh except by the special calling and grace  
 of God. See Romans 9:10ff.<sup>42</sup> Note that when he attributes justice to  
 God in 3:5 and 6:19, he corrects himself, because he is speaking thus  
 25 in a human way, on account of the weakness of the flesh.

[52] The passages we have discussed establish more than adequately  
 what we proposed to show: that God accommodated his revelations  
 to the power of understanding and to the opinions of the Prophets,  
 and that the Prophets could be ignorant of things which concern only  
 speculation, but not those which concern loving-kindness and how to  
 30 conduct our lives,<sup>43</sup> and that they really were ignorant and had contrary  
 opinions [regarding speculative matters]. So we really should not seek  
 knowledge of natural and spiritual things from them.

[53] We conclude, therefore, that we are not bound to believe the  
 Prophets regarding anything except what is the end and substance of  
 revelation.<sup>44</sup> In all other things each person is free to believe as he  
 pleases. For example, the revelation to Cain [Gen. 4:6–7] teaches us  
 [III/43] only that God warned him to lead a true life, for that was the only  
 intent and substance of the revelation, not teach the freedom of the  
 will or Philosophic matters. So even though the freedom of the will  
 is contained very clearly in the words and reasonings of that warning,  
 we are permitted to think the will is not free, since those words and  
 5 reasonings were only accommodated to Cain's power of understanding.

[54] Similarly, the revelation to Micaiah [1 Kings 22:19] means to  
 teach only that God revealed to Micaiah the true outcome of the battle  
 of Ahab against Aram. So this again is all we are bound to believe.  
 Whatever else is contained in that revelation, regarding the true and  
 10 false Spirit of God, and the host of heaven standing on each side of  
 God, and all the other circumstances of that revelation, does not touch

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42. The passage cited here has also been quoted in Volume I, cf. I/264–65, and will recur in the correspondence. The metaphor of the potter and the clay used there by Paul is also used, to an apparently different purpose, by Jeremiah in the chapter cited above. Spinoza's treatment of Paul as a prophet seems to conflict with the position he takes in Ch. xi.

43. Cf. Maimonides, *Guide*, II, 38. Spinoza here treats the question of man's ability to overcome temptation as a speculative matter, but it does seem to bear on practical matters. If we think people can't overcome temptation, this may affect whether we treat their shortcomings with forbearance.

44. Cf. Maimonides *Guide* II, 38: "Know that the true prophets indubitably grasp speculative matters" (Gebhardt V, 22).

us at all. So concerning those things each one may believe what seems more consistent with his reason.

[55] Concerning the reasonings by which God showed Job his power over all things [Job 38–41]—if indeed it is true that they were revealed  
 15 to Job and that the author [of that book] was concerned to narrate a history, not, as some believe,<sup>45</sup> to embellish his conceptions [by giving them a concrete form]—we must say the same thing: that they were adduced according to Job's power of understanding, and only to convince him, not that they are universal reasons for convincing everyone.

[56] We should maintain the same thing about the reasonings by  
 20 which Christ convicted the Pharisees of stubbornness and ignorance, and exhorted his disciples to the true life: he accommodated his reasonings to the opinions and principles of each one. E.g., when he said to the Pharisees (Matthew 12:26), *if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then should his kingdom stand?*, he just wanted to convince the Pharisees  
 25 from their own principles, not to teach that there are Devils, or that there is a kingdom of Devils.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, when he said to his disciples (Matthew 18:10), *see that you do not disdain one of those little ones, for I say to you that in the heavens their Angels etc. [always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven]*. For he just wanted to teach them not to be proud and not to  
 30 disdain anyone, but not the rest of the things which are contained in his reasons, which he offers only to persuade his disciples better.

[57] Finally, we must say absolutely the same thing about the reasonings and signs of the Apostles. There is no need to speak more fully about these matters. For if I had to enumerate all those Passages in Scripture which are written only *ad hominem*, or, according to someone's  
 [III/44] power of understanding, and which cannot be defended as divine teaching without great prejudice to Philosophy, I would give up the brevity I desire. Let it suffice, therefore, to have touched on a few, universal things. The rest the curious reader may weigh for himself.

[58] Although only the things we have said about the Prophets and  
 5 Prophecy pertain particularly to my purpose of separating Philosophy from Theology, nevertheless, because I have treated Prophecy generally, I want to ask now whether the gift of Prophecy was peculiar to the Hebrews or whether it was common to all nations. We also need to ask what we must maintain about the calling of the Hebrews. That's  
 10 the object of the following chapter.

45. Maimonides is apparently one of the people criticized here. Cf. x, 16–18. I've discussed Spinoza's interpretation of Job in Curley 2002.

46. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan* viii, 25–26.

[III/44]

# CHAPTER III

## *On the Calling of the Hebrews*

### AND WHETHER THE GIFT OF PROPHECY WAS PECULIAR TO THE HEBREWS

[1] The true happiness and blessedness of each person consists only  
15 in the enjoyment of the good, and not in a self-esteem founded on  
the fact that he alone enjoys the good, all others being excluded from  
it. For whoever views himself as more blessed because things are well  
with him, but not with others, or because he is more blessed and more  
fortunate than others, does not know true happiness and blessedness.  
20 The joy he derives from that comparison comes from envy and a bad  
heart—if it isn't mere childishness.

[2] For example, the true happiness and blessedness of man consists  
only in wisdom and in knowledge of the truth, not at all in the fact  
that he is wiser than others, or that others lack true knowledge. For  
their ignorance does not increase his wisdom at all, i.e., his true hap-  
25 piness. So someone who rejoices for that reason rejoices because of an  
evil occurring to someone else. He is envious and evil, failing to know  
either true wisdom or the peace of true life.

[3] To exhort the Hebrews to obey the law Scripture says

[i] that God chose them for himself before the other nations (Deuter-  
onomy 10:15),

30 [ii] that he is close to them, but not to others (Deuteronomy 4:4–7),

[iii] that he has prescribed just laws only for them (Deuteronomy 4:8),  
and finally,

[iv] that he has made himself known only to them, the others being  
treated as inferior (Deuteronomy 4:32), etc.

When it says this, it speaks only according to the power of under-  
[III/45] standing of people who, as we have shown in the preceding chapter,  
and as Moses himself witnesses (Deuteronomy 9:6–7), did not know  
true blessedness. [4] For surely they would have been no less blessed if  
God had called all equally to salvation; God would have been no less  
well-disposed toward them, if he had been equally close to the others;  
5 the laws would have been no less just, and the Hebrew people no less



wise, if the laws had been prescribed to all; miracles would have shown God's power no less if they had been performed for the sake of other nations also; and finally, the Hebrews would have been no less bound to worship God if God had bestowed all these gifts equally on all people.

[5] Moreover, what God says to Solomon—that no one after him  
 10 would be as wise as he was (1 Kings 3:12)—seems to be only a manner of speaking, to signify exceptional wisdom. However that may be, we must not in any way believe that God promised Solomon, for his greater happiness, that he would not afterward bestow such great wisdom on anyone else. For this would not increase Solomon's intellect at all, and a  
 15 wise King would give no less thanks to God for such a great gift, even if God had said that he would endow everyone with the same wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

[6] But though we say that in the passages of the Pentateuch just cited Moses was speaking according to the Hebrews' power of understanding, we still don't wish to deny that God prescribed those laws  
 20 of the Pentateuch only to them, or that he spoke only to them, or, finally, that the Hebrews saw wonders whose like no other nation ever saw. We mean only that Moses wanted to warn the Hebrews in this way, and especially by these reasons, so that he might bind them more to the worship of God, in accordance with their childish power  
 25 of understanding. Next, we wished to show that the Hebrews did not excel the other nations in 'knowledge or in piety, but in something altogether different—or (to speak, with Scripture, according to their power of understanding) that, though the Hebrews were frequently warned, they were not chosen by God before all others for a true life and lofty speculations, but for something entirely different. What this  
 30 was, I shall show here in an orderly fashion.

[7] But before I begin, I want to explain briefly what in the following I shall understand by God's guidance, by God's aid (both external and internal), by God's choice, and finally, by fortune.

By *God's guidance* I understand the fixed and immutable order of nature,  
 [III/46] or the connection of natural things.

[8] For we have said above, and have already shown elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> that the universal laws of nature, according to which all things happen and are determined, are nothing but the eternal decrees of God, which always involve eternal truth and necessity. Therefore, whether

1. Gebhardt notes a similar passage in Meyer 1666, 22 (iii, 21).

2. The earlier passage where this has been said is probably i, 44. The other work where this has been shown is probably CM II, 9 (I/267/17ff.), though as ALM note, this compromises the anonymity of the TTP. But I do not think Spinoza would be referring to the unpublished *Ethics*, and as ALM also note, ADN. VI also refers to the CM.

we say that all things happen according to the laws of nature, or that  
 5 they are ordered according to the decree and guidance of God, we say the same thing.

[9] Next, because the power of all natural things is nothing but the power itself of God, through which alone all things happen and are determined, from this it follows that whatever man, who is also a part of nature, provides for himself, as an aid to preserving his being, or  
 10 whatever nature supplies him with, without his doing anything himself, it is the power of God alone which provides these things for him, inasmuch as it acts either through human nature or through things outside human nature. Therefore,

whatever human nature can furnish for preserving its being from its own power alone, we can rightly call *God's internal aid*, and

whatever in addition turns out for his advantage from the power of  
 15 external causes, we can rightly call *God's external aid*.

[10] From these considerations it is easy to infer what must be understood by *God's choice*. For since no one does anything except according to the predetermined order of nature, i.e., according to God's eternal guidance and decree, it follows that

20 no one chooses any manner of living for himself, or does anything, except by the special calling of God, who has chosen him before others for this work, or for this manner of living.

[11] Finally,

by *fortune* I understand nothing but God's guidance, insofar as it directs human affairs through external and unforeseen causes.

With these preliminaries, we shall return to our purpose, which was  
 25 to see why the Hebrew nation was said to have been chosen by God before others. To show this, I proceed as follows.

[12] Whatever we can honorably desire is related above all to these three things:

- [i] understanding things through their first causes;
- 30 [ii] gaining control over the passions, *or* acquiring the habit of virtue; and finally,
- [iii] living securely and healthily.

The means which lead directly to the first and second of these, and can be considered their proximate and efficient causes, are contained in human nature itself. So acquiring them depends chiefly on our

power alone, *or* on the laws of human nature alone. For this reason we must maintain, without qualification, that these gifts are not peculiar  
 [III/47] to any nation, but have always been common to the whole human race—unless we want to dream that formerly nature produced different kinds of men.

[13] But the means which lead to living securely and preserving the body are chiefly placed in external things, and for that reason they are  
 5 called gifts of fortune, because they depend for the most part on the governance of external causes of which we are ignorant. So in this matter, the wise man and the fool are almost equally happy or unhappy.

Nevertheless, to live securely, and to avoid injuries from other men and from the beasts, human governance and vigilance can be a great  
 10 help. [14] To this end reason and experience have taught no more certain means than to form a social order with definite laws, to occupy a definite area of the world, and to reduce the powers of all, as it were, into one body, the body of the social order.

But to form and preserve a social order requires no small talent and vigilance. So a social order which for the most part is founded and  
 15 directed by prudent and vigilant men will be more secure, more stable, and less subject to fortune. Conversely, if a social order is established by men of untrained intelligence, it will depend for the most part on fortune and will be less stable. [15] If, in spite of this, it has lasted a long time, it will owe this to the guidance of another, not to its own  
 20 guidance. Indeed, if it has overcome great dangers and matters have turned out favorably for it, it will only be able to wonder at and revere the guidance of God (i.e., insofar as God acts through hidden external causes, but not insofar as he acts through human nature and the human mind). Since nothing has happened to it except what is completely unexpected and contrary to opinion, this can even be considered to  
 25 be really a miracle.

[16] The only thing which distinguishes one nation from one another, then, is the social order and the laws under which they live and by which they are directed. So the Hebrew nation was not chosen by God  
 30 before others because of its intellect or its peace of mind, but because of its social order and the fortune by which it came to have a state, and kept it for so many years.

[17] This is also established most plainly by Scripture itself. For if you run through it even casually, you will see clearly that the Hebrews excelled the other nations only in this: they handled their security auspiciously, and overcame great dangers. For the most part this was  
 [III/48] just by God's external aid. In other things, you will see that they were equal to others, and that God was equally well-disposed to all. [18] As

far as the intellect is concerned, it is clear (as we have shown in the preceding chapter) that they had quite ordinary thoughts about God and nature. They were not chosen by God before others for their  
 5 intellect. But neither were they chosen because of their virtue and true life. For in this respect also they were equal to the other nations and only a very few were chosen. [19] Their election, therefore, and their calling consisted only in the enduring prosperity of their state and in [other temporal] advantages.

Nor do we see that God promised the Patriarchs<sup>3\*\*</sup> or their successors  
 10 anything more than this. Indeed, all the Law promises for obedience is the continual prosperity of their state and the other advantages of this life. Conversely, [it threatened] nothing for obstinacy and breaking the covenant except the ruin of their state and the greatest [temporal] disadvantages.<sup>4</sup>

[20] This is not surprising. For the end of the whole social order and of the state—as is evident from what has just been said and as we shall show more fully in what follows—is to live securely and conven-  
 15 niently.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, a state can stand firm only if there are Laws by which each one is bound. But if all the members of a social order wish to abandon the laws, they thereby dissolve the social order and destroy the state. [21] So nothing else could be promised to the social order of the Hebrews, for their constant observance of the laws, except security  
 20 of life<sup>6\*\*</sup> and the advantages [security provides]. Conversely, no more certain punishment for obstinacy could be predicted than the ruin of the state, and the evils which commonly follow from that, along with the other evils which would arise especially for them because of the

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3. \*\*[ADN. IV] In Gen. 15[:1] it's related that God said to Abraham that he was his defender and that he would give him a very great reward. To this Abraham replied that he could expect nothing which would be of any importance, because, though already in advanced old age, he was childless.

4. In particular, the Hebrew Bible makes no promise of eternal life in return for obedience. Lucas's biography of Spinoza (1927) reports that one reason for the excommunication was that Spinoza denied the existence of scriptural evidence for immortality (and argued that the evidence for mortality was much stronger). Cf. i, 28. See also Nadler 2001.

5. In xx, 12, Spinoza will claim that the end of the state is really freedom (ALM). See the annotation there for more on this.

6. \*\*[ADN. V] From Mark 10:21 it's evident that observing the commandments of the Old Testament does not suffice for eternal life. [In Mark 10:17–22 a rich man asks Jesus what he needs to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus first says he must keep the commandments. When the rich man says he has done that, Jesus replies that he lacks one thing: he must sell what he owns, give the money to the poor, and follow Jesus. For useful discussion of the history of the interpretations of this challenging verse, see Anchor Mark, II, 727–30. There are parallel versions, with interesting variations, in Matt. 19:16–22 and Luke 18:18–25.]

ruin their particular state. But for the present there is no need to treat these things more fully.<sup>7</sup>

[22] I add only this: the Laws of the Old Testament were revealed  
 25 and prescribed only to the Jews. For since God chose only them to  
 constitute a particular social order and state, they necessarily had to  
 have special laws. Whether God prescribed special laws to other nations  
 also and revealed himself to their Legislators prophetically, i.e., under  
 30 those attributes by which they were accustomed to imagine God, that  
 seems to me not sufficiently established. But this, at least, is evident  
 from Scripture itself: that by God's external guidance the other nations  
 also had a state and their own special laws. [23] To show this I'll cite  
 just two passages of Scripture.

In Genesis 14:18–20 it is related that Melchizedek was king of  
 [III/49] Jerusalem<sup>8</sup> and priest of God, the most high, and that he blessed  
 Abraham, as was the right of the Priest (see Numbers 6:23), and finally,  
 that Abraham, the beloved of God, gave a tenth of all his spoils to the  
 priest of God. [24] All these things show clearly enough that, before  
 5 God founded the People of Israel, he had established kings and priests  
 in Jerusalem, and prescribed customs and laws for them. Whether he  
 did this prophetically or not—that, as we have said, is not sufficiently  
 clear. But this much, at least, I'm persuaded of: while Abraham lived  
 there, he lived scrupulously according to those laws. For Abraham did  
 not receive any rites specially from God; nevertheless Genesis 26:5 says  
 10 that Abraham observed the worship, precepts, institutions and Laws of  
 God. Doubtless these must be understood to be the worship, precepts,  
 institutions and laws of king Melchizedek.

[25] Again, Malachi (1:10–11) reproaches the Jews in these words:  
 מי גם בכם ויסגור דלתים ולא תאירו מזבחי חנם אין לי חפץ בכם וגו': כי ממזרה שמש  
 ועד מבואר גדול שמי בגוים ובכל מקום מוקטר מוגש לשמי ומנחה טהורה כי גדול שמי  
 בגוים אמר יהוה צבאות *Who is there among you who will close the doors* (sc.  
 of the temple), *so that the fire shall not be placed on my altar in vain; I*  
*take no pleasure in you, etc. For from the rising of the sun to its setting, my*

7. Bennett notes the shift in this paragraph from talk about goods “promised” for obedience to the laws to talk about “punishments predicted” for disobedience. Given the impersonality of Spinoza's conception of God, his identification (in iii, 7) of God's activity with the operation of the laws of nature, and his denial in the next chapter that God can be a lawgiver, the language of prediction can be taken more literally than the language of promises and threats.

8. Kirchmann (1871, 25–26) accused Spinoza of a gross error for identifying Melchizedek as the king of Jerusalem, when Gen. 14:18 identifies him as the king of Salem. He supposed Jerusalem to have been built much later, by David. ALM suggest that Spinoza is relying on a tradition which goes back to Josephus (*Antiquities* I, x, 2), according to which Salem was later called Jerusalem. But Spinoza may have been relying on the biblical passage which was probably the ultimate basis for Josephus's claim, Ps. 76:2.

name is great among the nations, and everywhere incense is set before me,  
 20 and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the God  
 of hosts. Unless we want to do violence to these words,<sup>9</sup> they can only  
 be taken as referring to the present time. So they testify more than  
 adequately that the Jews of that time were no more beloved of God  
 than the other Nations, indeed, that God had, by miracles, become  
 25 more known to the other Nations than to the Jews of that time, who  
 had then regained a part of their state without miracles, and finally, that  
 the Nations had rites and ceremonies which were acceptable to God.

[26] But I put these matters to one side. It is enough for my pur-  
 poses to have shown that the Jews' election concerned nothing but  
 the temporal prosperity of the body, and freedom, *or* a state, and the  
 30 manner and means by which they acquired it, and hence also the Laws,  
 insofar as they were necessary for making that particular state stable,  
 and finally, the manner in which those laws were revealed. In other  
 things, and in those in which the true happiness of man consists, I have  
 shown that they were equal to the other nations.

[27] So when it is said in Scripture (see Deut. 4:7) that no Nation  
 [III/50] has Gods as close to it as the Jews have God, that must be understood  
 only with respect to the state and only concerning that time in which  
 so many miracles happened to them. For with respect to intellect and  
 virtue, i.e., with respect to blessedness, God, as we have said and shown  
 by reason itself, is equally well-disposed to all. This is also sufficiently  
 established by Scripture itself.

5 [28] For the Psalmist says (Ps. 145:18): קרוב יהוה לכל קוראיו לכל אשר  
 יקראוהו באמת *God is near to all who call him, to all who truly call him.*  
 Similarly in the same Psalm, vs. 9: טוב יהוה לכל ורחמיו על כל מעשיו *God is*  
*beneficent to all, and his compassion (is) towards all things which he has made.*

10 In Ps. 33:15 it is said clearly that God has given the same intellect to  
 all, in these words: ה' יוצר לבם *who forms their heart in the same way.*  
 For the Hebrews believed the heart to be the seat of the soul and of  
 the intellect, as I believe everyone knows well enough.

[29] Again, Job 28:28<sup>10</sup> establishes that God prescribed this Law to  
 15 the whole human race: to revere God and to abstain from evil works,  
*or* to act well. So although Job was a gentile, he was most acceptable of

9. Some translations have put verse 11 in the future tense, e.g., the KJV: "my name *shall be* great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense *shall be* offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name *shall be* great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts." And some Christian readers have thus interpreted Malachi as prophesying the worldwide worship of the Christian church. The Vulgate, the NRSV, and the NJPS translation put verse 11 in the present tense. For discussion, see Anchor Malachi, 218–19.

10. Gebhardt has 29:28 here, which is clearly wrong. Droetto/Giancotti correct to 28:28, calling attention to III/54/18.

all to God, since he surpassed everyone in piety and in religion. Finally, Jonah 4:2 establishes most clearly that God is well-disposed, compassionate, long-suffering, full of beneficence, and repentant of evil toward  
 20 all men and not only toward the Jews. For Jonah says *for that reason I decided before to flee to Tarsus because I knew* (from the words of Moses in Exodus 34:6) *that you are a God who is well-disposed, compassionate, etc.* and therefore would pardon the gentiles of Nineveh.

25 [30] We conclude, then—since God is equally well-disposed to all and chose the Hebrews only with respect to their social order and their state—that each Jew, considered alone and outside that social order and state, possesses no gift of God which would place him above other men, and that there is no difference between him and a gentile.

[31] Since God is equally beneficent, compassionate, etc., to all, and  
 30 the function of the Prophet was to teach men, not the special laws of their native land so much as true virtue, and to advise them about that, there is no doubt that all the nations had Prophets, and that the gift of Prophecy was not peculiar to the Jews. Indeed, both sacred and profane histories testify to this. Although the sacred histories of the Old Testa-  
 [III/51] ment do not establish that the other Nations had as many Prophets as the Hebrews, or indeed that God sent any gentile Prophet expressly to the nations, that does not matter. For the Hebrews were concerned to write only of their own affairs, and not those of other nations.

[32] It is enough, then, that we should find in the Old Testament  
 5 men who were gentiles and uncircumcised (like Noah, Enoch, Abimelech, and Balaam) and prophesied, and that God sent the Hebrew Prophets not only to their own nation, but also to many others.<sup>11</sup> For Ezekiel prophesied to all the nations then known. Obadiah prophesied, so far as we know, only to the Edomites, and Jonah, principally to the Ninevites.

10 [33] Isaiah not only lamented and predicted the calamities of the Jews, and sang of their restoration, he also lamented the calamities of other nations. For he says in 16:9 *על כן אבכה בבכי יעזר Therefore I shall mourn with the weeping of Jazer*; and in ch. 19 he predicts first the calamities of the Egyptians, and afterward their restoration (see 19:19, 20, 21, 25).  
 15 He says God will send a Savior to them, who will free them, that God will become known to them, and finally, that the Egyptians will worship God with sacrifices and offerings. In the end he calls this nation *Blessed Egypt, people of God*. All these things are most worthy of being noted.

11. ALM point out that support can be found in the Talmud for the possibility of prophets among the gentiles, and of Hebrew prophets to the gentiles. See Baba Bathra 15b. But it seems that there was strong opposition to the idea among Spinoza's Jewish contemporaries. See iii, 40, and the annotation there.



[34] Finally, Jeremiah is called not only a Prophet of the Hebrew  
 20 people, but a Prophet of the nations without exception (see 1:5). He  
 too laments when he predicts the calamities of the nations, and predicts  
 their restoration; for he says in 48:31 על כן על מואב איליל ולמואב כלה אזעק  
*Therefore I wail for Moab, I cry out for all Moab etc.*, and in 48:36 על כן  
 25 יהמה לבי למואב כחללים יהמה *Therefore my heart beats for Moab like a drum*. And  
 finally he predicts their restoration, as he does also the restoration of  
 the Egyptians, the Ammonites and the Elamites.

[35] So there is no doubt that the other nations had their own  
 Prophets also, as the Jews did, who prophesied to them and to the  
 30 Jews. Although Scripture mentions only Balaam to whom the future  
 affairs of the Jews and of other nations were revealed, nevertheless it  
 is not credible that Balaam prophesied only on that occasion. For the  
 narrative itself establishes very clearly that he had long been famous  
 for prophecy and other divine gifts. When Balak bids him to come to  
 [III/52] him, he says (Numbers 22:6) כי ידעתי את אשר תברך יבורך ואשר תאור יואר  
*since I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is*  
*cursed*. So he had that same power which God bestowed on Abraham  
 (see Genesis 12:3).

[36] Again, Balaam replies to the messengers like one who is accus-  
 5 tomed to prophecies, saying that they should wait for him until the will  
 of God is revealed to him. When he prophesied, i.e., when he interpreted  
 the true mind of God, he was accustomed to say this of himself: נאם  
 the oracle of him *the oracle of him*  
*who hears the dictates of God, and who knows the 'knowledge* (or mind and  
 10 *foreknowledge) of the most high, who sees the vision of the almighty, falling*  
*down, but with his eyes open.*<sup>12</sup> Finally, after he has blessed the Hebrews  
 according to the command of God, he began (as was his custom) to  
 prophesy to the other nations and to predict their future affairs.

[37] All these things indicate more than adequately either that Balaam  
 was always a Prophet, or that he prophesied quite frequently, and  
 15 (what is still to be noted here) that he had what mainly rendered the  
 Prophets certain of the truth of their prophecy: a heart inclined only to  
 the right and the good. For he did not bless those whom he wished to  
 and curse those whom he wished to, as Balak thought, but only those  
 whom God willed to be blessed or cursed. That is why he replied to  
 20 Balak *even if Balak should give me enough silver and gold to fill his house,*  
*I cannot transgress God's edict, to do good or evil according to my own will;*  
*what God speaks I will speak.*<sup>13</sup>

12. Num. 24:16, cf. 24:4.

13. Num. 24:13, cf. 22:18.

[38] As for the fact that God was angry with him while he was on his journey, that also happened to Moses, when, in accordance with God's command (see Exodus 4:24), he was setting out for Egypt. As for the  
 25 fact that he accepted money for prophesying, Samuel did the same (see 1 Samuel 9:7–8). And if he sinned in some matter (concerning this, see 2 Peter 2:15–16 and Jude 11), *no one is so righteous that he always acts well and never sins* (see Ecclesiastes 7:20). Surely his utterances must  
 30 always have had great value before God and his power of cursing was certainly very great, since it is found so often in Scripture (in order to show God's great compassion toward the Israelites) that God would not listen to Balaam and that he turned his curse into a blessing (see Deuteronomy 23:6,<sup>14</sup> Joshua 24:10, Nehemiah 13:2). So there is no doubt that he was most acceptable to God. For the utterances and  
 [III/53] curses of impious men do not move God at all.

[39] So since Balaam was a true Prophet and nevertheless Joshua (13:22) calls him קוסם, *divine* or *soothsayer*, it is certain that this term is also taken in a good sense: those whom the gentiles were accustomed to call soothsayers and divines were true Prophets, and those whom Scrip-  
 5 ture often accuses and condemns were Pseudo-divines, who deceived the nations as the Pseudo-prophets deceived the Jews. Scripture clearly establishes this too in other passages. So we conclude that the gift of Prophecy was not peculiar to the Jews, but common to all the nations.

10 [40] Still, the Pharisees bitterly maintain the contrary, that this divine gift was peculiar to their nation, and that the other nations predicted future affairs by I know not what diabolical power.<sup>15</sup> What will superstition not invent? The main passage they cite, to confirm this opinion by the authority of the Old Testament, is Exodus 33:16, where Moses  
 15 says to God: ובמה יודע אפה<sup>16</sup> כי מצאתי חן בעיניך אני ועמך הלא בלכתך עמנו ונפלינו *for how shall it be known that I and your people have found grace in your eyes? surely when you go with us, and we are separated, I and your people, from every people on the surface of the earth.*

20 [41] From this the Pharisees want to infer that Moses asked God to be present to the Jews, to reveal himself prophetically to them, and to grant this grace to no other nation.

14. Spinoza follows the numbering of the Hebrew Bible here. The reference is to Deut. 23:5.

15. Ibn Ezra (1988) denied that there were heathen prophets and that Balaam was a prophet. See his commentary on Deut. 13:2 and Num. 22:28. He maintains that Balaam was a diviner who made use of astrology. Rashi's commentary (1960) on Exod. 33:16–17 allows that Balaam was a prophet, and that there were other heathen prophets, but denies that Balaam was able to prophesy because the glory of the Lord rested on him. He contends that the heathen prophets heard God's message "through a medium."

16. MT: אפה.

It's ridiculous, of course, that Moses should envy God's presence to the nations, or that he should have dared to ask such a thing of God. But the fact is that after Moses knew the mentality and stubborn heart  
 25 of his nation, he saw clearly that they could not finish what they had begun without the greatest miracles and the special external aid of God—indeed, that they would necessarily perish without such aid. To establish that God wished them to be preserved, he asked this special external aid of God. So he says in [Exodus] 34:9 *if I have found grace in*  
 30 *your eyes, Lord, may the Lord go among us, since this is a stiff-necked people, etc.* [42] The reason, then, why he asked this special external aid of God was that the people were stubborn. And God's response shows even more clearly that Moses asked for nothing beyond this special external aid of God. For he immediately replied (Exodus 34:10): *Behold, I make*  
 [III/54] *a covenant, that in the presence of your whole people I shall do wonders which*  
 only with the choice of the Hebrews, as I have explained it, and does not ask anything else of God.

[43] Nevertheless, in Paul's epistle to the Romans I find another text which moves me more, viz. 3:1–2, where Paul seems to teach something  
 5 other than what we do here. For he says *what, then, is the superiority of the Jew? or what is the advantage of circumcision? it is great in every way; for the primary one is that the utterances of God were entrusted to him.*

But if we attend to the doctrine which Paul mainly wants to teach, we shall find nothing contrary to our doctrine; on the contrary, we shall  
 10 find that he teaches the same thing we do here. For he says (3:29) that God is the God both of the Jews and of the nations, and in 2:25–26: *if he who is circumcised departs from the law, his circumcision will be made a foreskin; on the other hand, if he who has a foreskin observes the commandment of the law, his foreskin will be counted as circumcision.* [44] Again, in 3:9  
 15 and 4:15 he says that all—the Jews and the nations equally—have been under sin, but that there is no sin without a commandment and a law.

From this it is established with the utmost clarity that the law was revealed to everyone without exception (as we have also shown above from Job 28:28), and that all have lived under the law, i.e., under that  
 20 law which concerns only true virtue, and not that which is established according to the nature and constitution of some particular state, and is accommodated to the mentality of one nation.

[45] Finally, Paul concludes that since God is the God of all nations, i.e., since he is equally well-disposed to all, and all were  
 25 equally under the law and sin, God sent to all nations his Christ, who would free all equally from bondage to the law, so that they would no longer act well because of the Law's commandment, but

because of a constant decision of the heart. So Paul teaches exactly what we require.

[46] When Paul says that *the utterances of God were entrusted only to the Jews*, either we must understand that only to them were the Laws entrusted in writing, but that to the other nations they were entrusted  
 30 only by revelation and concept,<sup>17</sup> or we must say that (since Paul was concerned to rebut an objection which only the Jews could make) he was replying according to the power of understanding of the Jews, and the opinions then received among them. For in order to teach those things which he partly saw and partly heard, he was a Greek with the Greeks and a Jew with the Jews.<sup>18</sup>

[47] Now all that remains is to reply to certain arguments by which  
 [III/55] they<sup>19</sup> want to persuade themselves that the choice of the Hebrews was not for a time, and in relation only to their state, but eternal. For they say: [i] we see that after the loss of their state the Jews have survived for many years, though they were scattered everywhere and separated  
 5 from all the nations. This has not happened to any other Nation. And [ii] we see that in many places the Sacred Texts seem to teach that God chose the Jews unto himself to eternity. So even if they have lost their state, they remain God's chosen people.

[48] There are two principal passages which they think teach this eternal choice most clearly: (1) Jeremiah 31:36, where the Prophet  
 10 testifies that the seed of Israel will remain God's nation to eternity, evidently comparing them with the fixed order of the heavens and of nature; and (2) Ezekiel 20:32[–44], where [the Prophet] seems to claim that even though the Jews deliberately choose to abandon the worship of God, he will still gather them from all the regions into which they have been dispersed, lead them to the wilderness of the peoples (as he  
 15 led their ancestors to the wilderness of Egypt), and at last, after he has weeded out the rebels and the transgressors from among them, lead them from there to the mount of his holiness, where the whole house of Israel will worship him.

[49] It's common—especially among the Pharisees—to bring up other passages besides these. But I think I will satisfy everyone if I reply to

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17. Presumably there is a reference here to the Pauline doctrine that the law is written in the hearts of the gentiles (Rom. 2:15).

18. See 1 Cor. 9:19–23, cited again in vi, 36, and xi, 23.

19. Spinoza does not make his subject explicit here. From §40 we might suppose he is speaking only of the Pharisees. But the beginning of §49 suggests that he means Jews generally, and especially the Pharisees. Gebhardt V, 28, notes that Rabbi Morteira, one of Spinoza's teachers, had defended the eternity of the Jews' election in *Providência de Dios con Israel*. He thinks the passage to follow must have its origins in the defense of his opinions Spinoza is reported to have written after the excommunication.

20 these two. This I will do very easily, once I have shown from Scripture itself that God did not choose the Hebrews to eternity, but only on the same condition on which he previously chose the Canaanites. They too, as we have shown above,<sup>20</sup> had priests who worshipped God scrupulously. But God still rejected them on account of their extravagant living, their negligence, and their bad worship. [50] For in Leviticus 25 18:27–28 Moses warns the Israelites that they should not be defiled by abominations, as the Canaanites were, lest the earth vomit them forth, as it vomited forth the nations which inhabited those places. And Deuteronomy 8:19–20 threatens them most explicitly with total ruin. For it says העדותי בכם היום כי אבד תאבדון כגוים אשר יהוה מאביד מפניכם כן תאבדון 30 *I declare to you this day, that you will perish without exception; like the nations which God made perish from your presence, so you will perish.* Similarly we find other passages in the Law which indicate explicitly that God did not choose the Hebrew nation unconditionally, nor to eternity.

[51] So if the Prophets predicted a new and eternal covenant of the knowledge, love, and grace of God, it is easily proven that this [III/56] was promised only to the pious. For in the chapter of Ezekiel we have just cited, it is said<sup>21</sup> explicitly that God will separate the rebels and transgressors from them, and in Zephaniah 3:12–13,<sup>22</sup> that God will remove the proud from the midst [of the people of Israel] and will let 5 the poor survive. Because this choice concerns true virtue, we must not think it was promised only to the pious among the Jews, the others being excluded. Rather we must believe that the true gentile Prophets—whom we have shown that all nations had—promised the same thing to the faithful of their Nations, and comforted them with it. [52] 10 So this eternal covenant of the knowledge and love of God is universal.

[The universality of the covenant] is also established with the utmost clarity by Zephaniah 3:10–11. So we must admit no difference in this matter between the Jews and the nations, nor is there any other election peculiar to them, beyond what we have already shown.

Granted, when the Prophets speak about this election, which con- 15 cerns only true virtue, they mix in many things about sacrifices and other ceremonies, and about the rebuilding of the Temple and the City. But that's because, as was the custom in prophecy, and its nature, they wanted to explain spiritual matters in figurative expressions. That way they would at the same time indicate to the Jews, whose Prophets they were, that the restoration of the state and of the Temple was to be

20. The reference is probably to iii, 23–24.

21. God is presented as saying this in Ezek. 20:38.

22. As the verses are normally divided now, the reference should be to verses 11–12. Once again it is God who is reported as saying this.

expected in the time of Cyrus. [53] So today the Jews have absolutely  
 20 nothing which they could attribute to themselves beyond all the Nations.

It's true also that they have survived for many years, in spite of being scattered and without a state. But that is nothing to wonder at, after they separated themselves so from all the nations that they have drawn the hatred of all men against themselves, not only by having external customs contrary to the customs of the other nations, but also by the sign of circumcision, which they maintain most scrupulously.<sup>23</sup>

25 Moreover, experience has already taught that the hatred of the Nations has done much to preserve them. [54] Previously, when the King of Spain compelled the Jews either to accept the Religion of the Kingdom or to go into exile, a great many Jews accepted the Religion of the priests. But because all the privileges of native Spaniards were  
 30 granted to those who accepted that religion, and they were thought worthy of all honors, they immediately mixed themselves with the Spaniards. As a result, after a little while no traces of them remained, nor any memory. Just the opposite happened to those whom the King of Portugal compelled to accept the religion of his state. Although they converted to that religion, they always lived separated from everyone  
 [III/57] else, presumably because he declared them unworthy of all honors.<sup>24</sup>

[55] I think the sign of circumcision is also so important in this matter that I am persuaded that this one thing will preserve this Nation to eternity. Indeed, if the foundations of their religion did not make their hearts unmanly, I would absolutely believe that some day, given the opportunity, they would set up their state again, and God would  
 5 choose them anew. That's how changeable human affairs are.

[56] We have another excellent example of [the importance of a distinguishing mark in preserving national identity] in the Chinese. They have most scrupulously kept a kind of tail on their head, by which they separate themselves from everyone else. Thus separated, they have preserved themselves for so many thousands of years that they far surpass  
 10 all other nations in antiquity. They have not always remained in charge

23. Cf. Tacitus on the history of the Jews (*Histories* V, 2–5).

24. On the history of the persecutions of the Jews on the Iberian peninsula, see Roth 1947 and Kamen 1997. Roth thinks there was more assimilation in Spain because when Ferdinand forced the Jews to choose between baptism and exile, the more devout Jews fled to Portugal; those who remained were the less committed. But Spinoza is mistaken in saying that in Spain the *conversos*, or “new Christians,” were thought worthy of all honors. As Méchoulan 1984 points out, the purity of blood legislation there made a significant distinction between them and “old Christians.” And as he also notes, it's surprising that Spinoza makes this mistake, since he should have known about the discrimination against them, if not from his contact with Spanish refugees in the Netherlands, then from one of the stories in Cervantes' *Novelas exemplares*, which he had in his library. For a detailed account of the cult of *limpieza del sangre*, see Kamen 1997, ch. 11.

of their state; but they have regained it when it was lost. Doubtless they will regain it again, when the hearts of the Tartars begin to grow feeble from the negligence and extravagant living of wealth.

[57] Finally, if anyone wants to maintain, for this or some other reason, that God has chosen the Jews to eternity, I won't resist that, 15 provided he maintains that—whether this election is for a time or eternal—insofar as it is peculiar to the Jews, it concerns only their state and the advantages of the body. This is the only thing which can distinguish one Nation from another. In intellect and true virtue no nation is distinguished from any other; so in these matters God has not chosen one in preference to the others.

[III/57]

## CHAPTER IV

### *Of the Divine Law*

[1] The word *law*, taken without qualification,<sup>1</sup> means that according to which each individual, or all or some members of the same species, act 25 in one and the same fixed and determinate way. This depends either on a necessity of nature or on a human decision. A law which depends on a necessity of nature is one which follows necessarily from the very nature *or* definition of a thing. One which depends on a human decision, and which is more properly called legislation, is one which men prescribe for themselves and others, for the sake of living more safely 30 and conveniently, or for some other causes.

[2] For example, it is a universal law of all bodies, which follows from a necessity of nature, that a body which strikes against another

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1. I take it that here Spinoza is offering a definition of “law” in the most general sense of that term, which covers both the two kinds of law he is about to distinguish: descriptive laws, true in virtue of natural necessity, and prescriptive laws, valid because of human decisions. The laws of nature (of physics and of psychology) exemplify the first kind of laws; the laws of human societies, which establish principles according to which men agree to live, exemplify the second. In iv, 5, Spinoza seems to privilege the second kind of law, saying that this is what men commonly mean by the term, that the term “law” is applied only figuratively to laws of the first kind, and that the term “law” seems to need to be defined more particularly, as a principle of living men prescribe to themselves. But I agree with Rutherford 2010 that the first type of law is more basic, in that the necessary laws of human nature explain why men prescribe to themselves the laws they do. If Spinoza gives preference in §5 to the definition of laws as prescriptions, I think that is primarily because that is the sense of “law” which is most relevant to this chapter. But in Chapter VI, it is the definition of laws as statements of natural necessity which will be most relevant.



[III/58] lesser body loses as much of its motion as it communicates to the other body.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, it is a law which necessarily follows from human nature that when a man recalls one thing, he immediately recalls another like it, or one he had perceived together with the first thing. But [the law] that men should yield, or be compelled to yield, the right they have  
 5 from nature, and bind themselves to a fixed way of living, depends on a human decision.

[3] Though I grant, without reservation, that everything is determined by the universal laws of nature to exist and produce effects in a fixed and determinate way, nevertheless I have two reasons for saying that laws of this second kind depend on a decision of men. First,

- 10 because insofar as man is a part of nature, he constitutes part of the power of nature. So the things which follow from the necessity of human nature—i.e., from nature itself insofar as we conceive it to be determinate through human nature—still follow, even though by necessity, from human power.

That's why we can say quite properly that the enactment of those  
 15 laws depends on a decision of men: it depends mainly on the power of the human mind, but in such a way that the human mind, insofar as it perceives things as either true or false, can be conceived quite clearly without these laws [that depend on a human decision], although it cannot be conceived without a necessary law, as we have just defined it.

[4] Second, I have also said that these laws depend on a human decision

- 20 because we ought to define and explain things through their proximate causes. That universal consideration concerning fate and the connection of causes cannot help us to form and order our thoughts concerning particular things.

Furthermore, we are completely ignorant of the order and connection  
 25 of things itself, i.e., of how things are really ordered and connected. So for practical purposes it is better, indeed necessary, to consider things as possible. These remarks will suffice concerning *law*, taken without qualification.

[5] But since the word *law* seems to be applied figuratively to natural  
 30 things, and commonly nothing is understood by law but a command which men can either carry out or neglect—since law confines human power under certain limits, beyond which that power extends, and does not command anything beyond human powers—for that reason Law

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2. This is roughly Descartes' third law of motion. Cf. his *Principles of Philosophy* II, 40.

seems to need to be defined more particularly: that it is a principle of living man prescribes to himself or to others for some end.

[6] Nevertheless, since the true end of laws is usually evident only  
 [III/59] to a few, and since most men are almost incapable of perceiving it, and do anything but live according to reason, legislators, to confine all men equally, have wisely established another end, very different from the one which necessarily follows from the nature of laws: they promise those  
 5 who support the laws what the common people most love, and they threaten those who would break the laws with what they most fear. In this way they have tried, as far as they could, to restrain the common people, as you might rein in a horse.

[7] That's why law is generally taken to be a principle of living prescribed to men by the command of others,<sup>3</sup> and why those who  
 10 obey the laws are said to live under the law, and seem to be slaves. And really, whoever gives each one his due because he fears the gallows does act according to the command of another and is coerced by evil. He cannot be called just. But the person who gives to each his due because he knows the true reason for the laws and their necessity, that  
 15 person acts from a constant heart, and by his own decision, not that of another. So he deserves to be called just.<sup>4</sup>

[8] I think Paul also wanted to teach this when he said that those who live under the law could not be justified by the law [Romans 3:19–20]. For justice is commonly defined as a constant and perpetual will to  
 20 give to everyone his due.<sup>5</sup> So Solomon says in Proverbs 21:15 that *the Just man rejoices when a Judgment is made, but the unjust are terrified*.<sup>6</sup>

[9] Since, therefore, Law is nothing but a principle of living which men prescribe to themselves or to others for some end, it seems that Law must be distinguished into human and divine. By human law I understand a principle of living which serves only to protect life and  
 25 the republic; by a divine law, one which aims only at the supreme good, i.e., the true knowledge and love of God. I call this law divine because of the nature of the supreme good, which I shall show here as briefly and clearly as I can.

[10] If we really want to seek our advantage, then since the intel-  
 30 lect is the better part of us, we should certainly strive above all to

3. Cf. Hobbes, DC vi, 9.

4. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan* xv, 10.

5. As Hobbes notes (*Leviathan* xv, 3), this is the common scholastic definition of justice, defended, for example, by Aquinas, ST II-IIae, qu. lviii, art. 1. In DC iii, 5, Hobbes also gives an account of what it is for a man to be just which is like (but not identical with) Spinoza's.

6. In x, 4, Spinoza will implicitly reject the attribution of Proverbs to Solomon.

perfect it as much as we can. For our supreme good must consist in the perfection of the intellect. Next, because nothing can either be or be conceived without God, and because we can doubt everything so long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God, all our knowledge, and the certainty which really removes all doubt, depends only on the knowledge of God. It follows that our supreme good and perfection depend only on the knowledge of God, etc.

[11] Next, since nothing can be or be conceived without God, it is certain that all things in nature involve and express the concept of God, in proportion to their essence and perfection. Hence the more we know natural things, the greater and more perfect is the knowledge of God we acquire—or, since knowledge of an effect through its cause is nothing but knowing some property of the cause, the more we know natural things, the more perfectly we know God's essence, which is the cause of all things. [12] So all our knowledge, i.e., our supreme good, not only depends on the knowledge of God, but consists entirely in it.

That knowledge of God is our supreme good also follows from the fact that a man is more perfect in proportion to the nature and perfection of the thing which he loves before all others, and conversely. Therefore, the man who is necessarily the most perfect and who participates most in supreme blessedness is the one who loves above all else the intellectual knowledge of God, the most perfect being, and takes the greatest pleasure in that knowledge. Our supreme good, then, and our blessedness come back to this: the knowledge and love of God.

[13] We can call the means required by this end of all human actions—i.e., God, insofar as his idea is in us—God's commands, because God himself, insofar as he exists in our mind, prescribes them to us, as it were. So the principle of living which aims at this end is quite properly called a Divine law. But what these means are, and what principle of living this end requires, and how the foundations of the best republic and the principle of living among men follow from this,<sup>7</sup> these matters all pertain to a universal Ethics. Here I shall proceed to treat only of the divine law in general.

[14] Since, then, the love of God is man's highest happiness and blessedness, and the ultimate end and object of all human actions, the only one who follows the divine law is the one who devotes himself to loving God, not from fear of punishment, nor from love for another thing, such as pleasures or reputation, etc., but only because he knows God, *or* because he knows that the knowledge and love of God is the highest good.

7. Reading *hinc* for *hunc* here (following a suggestion of Wernham's).

[15] So the main point of the divine law, and its highest precept, [III/61] is to love God as the highest good, as we have said, not from fear of some punishment or penalty, nor from love of some other thing, in which we desire to take pleasure. For the idea of God dictates this: that God is our supreme good, *or* that the knowledge and love of God 5 is the ultimate end toward which all our actions ought to be directed.<sup>8</sup>

[16] In spite of this, the man of the flesh<sup>9</sup> cannot understand these things. To him they seem hollow, because he has too meager a knowledge of God, and finds nothing in this highest good to touch or eat or affect the flesh, which is what gives him his greatest pleasure. This good consists only in contemplation and in a pure mind. But those who 10 know that they have nothing more excellent than the intellect and a healthy mind will doubtless judge these things very solid.

[17] We have explained, therefore, what the divine law consists in above all, and what laws are human, viz. all those which aim at something other [than the knowledge of God]—unless they have been enacted by revelation. For as we have shown above, that is another reason why we 15 may refer things to God. It's in this sense that the law of Moses, although not universal, but accommodated for the most part to the mentality and special preservation of one people, can still be called God's Law, *or* divine Law. For we believe it was enacted by the Prophetic light.

20 [18] If now we attend to the Nature of natural divine law, as we have just explained it, we shall see:

I. that it is universal, *or* common to all men,

for we have deduced it from universal human nature; and

II. that it does not require faith in historical narratives, no matter what, in the end, those narratives are.<sup>10</sup>

For since this natural divine law is understood simply by the con- 25 sideration of human nature, it is certain that we can conceive it just as much in Adam as in any other man, just as much in a man who lives among others as in a man who lives a solitary life.

[19] Furthermore, faith in historical narratives, no matter how certain that faith may be, cannot give us any knowledge of God. So 30 it also cannot give us the love of God. For love of God arises from

8. A central theme in Spinoza, to which he will return in the last half of Part V of the *Ethics*.

9. *Homo carnalis*. An allusion to St. Paul. Cf. Romans (6:19, 7:5, 18, 25) or 1 Cor. 3:1–3.

10. Spinoza does not spell out the implications of this position, but on its face it excludes a doctrine common in Christianity, that belief in certain historical facts about Jesus—that he was the son of God, whose sacrificial death on the cross redeemed mankind from sin—is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for salvation. Cf. John 3:16–18.

knowledge of him, and knowledge of God must be drawn from common notions certain and known through themselves. So it is far from true that faith in historical narratives is necessary for us to attain our supreme good.

Nevertheless, though faith in historical narratives cannot give us the knowledge and love of God, we do not deny that reading them is very  
[III/62] useful in relation to civil life. For the more we have observed and the better we know the customs and character of men—which can best be known from their actions—the more cautiously we will be able to live among them and the better we will be able to accommodate our actions  
5 and lives to their mentality, as much as reason allows.

[20] [Again, if we attend to the nature of natural divine law], we see

III. that it does not require ceremonies, i.e., actions which in themselves are indifferent, and are called good only by institution, or which represent some good necessary for salvation, or, if you prefer, actions whose reason surpasses man's power of understanding.

10 For the natural light requires nothing that light itself does not reach, but only what can indicate to us very clearly a good, *or* a means to our blessedness.<sup>11</sup> The things which are good only by command and institution, or because they are representations of some good, cannot perfect our intellect and are nothing but mere shadows. They cannot  
15 be counted among the actions which are, as it were, the offspring or fruits of the intellect and of a healthy mind. But there is no need to show this more fully here.

[21] Finally, [if we attend to the nature of natural divine law] we see

IV. that the highest reward for observing the divine law is the law itself, viz. to know God and to love him from true freedom and with a whole and  
20 constant heart, whereas the penalty for not observing it is the privation of these things and bondage to the flesh, *or* an inconstant and vacillating heart.

[22] With these things noted, we must now ask:

(i) whether, by the natural light, we can conceive God as a lawgiver, or prince prescribing laws to men?<sup>12</sup>

(ii) what Sacred Scripture teaches concerning this natural light and natural law?

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11. This formula provides an interesting gloss on the definition of “good” in E IV D1, answering a question that definition does not address: For what end is the good useful to us?

12. For an alternate version of this argument, see KV II, xxiv, 4 (Volume I, p. 142). See also E II P3S, ADN. XXXIV at xvi, 53 (III/198/13), and TP ii, 22.

- (iii) to what end ceremonies were formerly instituted? and finally,  
 25 (iv) why it matters whether we know the sacred historical narratives and believe in them?

I shall treat the first two of these questions in this chapter [§§23–37 and 38–50], and the last two in the next chapter [§§2–34 and 35–50].

[23] We can easily deduce what we must maintain in answer to the first question from the nature of God's will, which is distinguished from his intellect only in relation to our reason. That is, in themselves God's  
 30 will and God's intellect are really one and the same; they are distinguished only in relation to the thoughts we form about God's intellect.<sup>13</sup>

[24] For example, when we attend only to the fact that the nature of a triangle is contained in the divine nature from eternity, as an eternal truth, then we say that God has the idea of the triangle, *or* understands  
 [III/63] the nature of the triangle. But afterward we may attend to the fact that the nature of the triangle is contained in the divine nature solely from the necessity of the divine nature, and not from the necessity of the essence and nature of the triangle—indeed, that the necessity of the essence and properties of the triangle, insofar as they too are conceived  
 5 as eternal truths, depends only on the necessity of the divine nature and intellect, and not on the nature of the triangle. When we do that, then the same thing we called God's intellect we call God's will *or* decree.

[25] So in relation to God we affirm one and the same thing when we say that from eternity God decreed and willed that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, *or* [when we say] that God  
 10 understood this. From this it follows that God's affirmations and denials always involve eternal necessity *or* truth.<sup>14</sup>

[26] So, for example, if God said to Adam that he willed him not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil [Genesis 2:17], it would imply a contradiction for Adam to be able to eat of that tree. So  
 15 it would be impossible for him to eat of it. That divine decree would have had to involve eternal necessity and truth. But since Scripture nevertheless relates that God did tell Adam not to eat of the tree, and that Adam nevertheless ate of the tree, we must say that God only

13. This is a common medieval doctrine—cf. Maimonides *Guide* I, 53; Aquinas, ST I, 3—also advocated by Descartes. See his letter to Mersenne, 6 May 1630 (where the formulation nevertheless seems to give a certain priority to God's will). But since Spinoza's *Ethics* denies both will and intellect to God (E I P31), his argument here may be *ad hominem*.

14. ALM note that this claim will reappear in xix, 18, where it becomes a ground for claiming that the teachings of religion do not acquire the force of a command immediately from God, but only from the civil sovereign. Cf. TP ii, 22, where Spinoza explains a sense in which man can act contrary to God's decrees.

revealed to Adam the evil which would necessarily befall him if he ate of that tree, but not the necessity of that evil's following.<sup>15</sup>

[27] That's how it happened that Adam perceived that revelation, not as an eternal and necessary truth, but as a law, i.e., as something instituted, which profit or loss follows, not from the necessity and nature of the action performed, but solely from the pleasure and absolute command of some Prince. So that revelation was a law, and God, as it were, a lawgiver or Prince, only in relation to Adam, and because of a defect in his knowledge.

[28] That's also why the Decalogue was a law only in relation to the Hebrews, because of a defect in their knowledge. For since they did not know God's existence as an eternal truth, they had to perceive as a law what was revealed to them in the Decalogue: that God exists and that he alone is to be worshipped. If God had spoken to them immediately, without using any corporeal means, they would have perceived this, not as a law, but as an eternal truth.

[29] What we say about the Israelites and Adam must also be said [III/64] about all the Prophets who wrote laws in the name of God: they did not perceive God's decrees adequately, as eternal truths. For example, we must say even of Moses himself that by revelation, or from the foundations revealed to him, he perceived the way the people of Israel could best be united in a certain region of the world, and could form a whole social order, *or* set up a state. He also perceived the way that people could best be compelled to obedience. But he did not perceive, and it was not revealed to him, that that way is best—or even that the goal

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15. I take Spinoza's point in this paragraph to be that, contrary to the usual way of reading Gen. 2:15-17, we should not interpret that passage as reporting that God *commanded* Adam not to eat of the tree, i.e., expressing a volition that Adam not eat from the tree. Spinoza thinks it involves a contradiction for an omnipotent being to command one of his creatures not to do something which the creature then does. On a proper understanding of omnipotence, it is impossible for an omnipotent being to will something – something logically possible, at least – which does not happen. So if God really had commanded Adam not to eat from the tree, Adam would not have eaten its fruit.

The passage in Genesis does contain a form of words naturally understood as expressing an imperative: e.g., (in the New JPS translation) "you must not eat of the tree." But imperatives do not always express commands; sometimes they express counsel. (Cf. Hobbes, DCv, iv, 1; *Leviathan* xxv, 1-3) The fact that God does not simply tell Adam to refrain, relying only on that's being his will, but offers a reason for refraining which involves a benefit to Adam ("in the day that you eat of it, you shall die"), arguably makes this counsel rather than command. Spinoza's language in l. 17 – *Scriptura . . . narrat, Deum id Adamo praecepisse* – admits both these possibilities, since a *praeceptum* can be either advice or an order. Of course, laws are normally accompanied by penalties which must be paid if they are broken, but those penalties normally depend on the contingent will of the lawmaker, not natural necessity.

Note that when Spinoza returns to this topic in §§38–39, he offers a different reading, and expresses doubt that he has understood the intention of the writer of Genesis.



they were aiming at would necessarily follow from the general obedience of the people in such a region of the world. [30] So he perceived all these things, not as eternal truths, but as precepts and institutions, and he prescribed them as laws of God. That's why he imagined God as a ruler, a lawgiver, a king, as compassionate, just, etc., when all these things are attributes only of human nature, and ought to be removed entirely from the divine nature.<sup>16</sup>

But I say this only about the Prophets, who wrote laws in the name of God, and not about Christ. [31] For however much Christ too may seem to have written laws in the name of God, nevertheless we must think that he perceived things truly and adequately. Christ was not so much a Prophet as the mouth of God. As we have shown in Chapter 1, God revealed certain things to the human race through the mind of Christ, as previously he had revealed them through Angels, i.e., through a created voice, visions, etc. It would be as contrary to reason to maintain that God accommodated his revelations to Christ's opinions as to maintain that previously, to communicate the things to be revealed to his prophets, God accommodated his revelations to the angels' opinions, i.e., those of a created voice and of visions. No one could maintain anything more absurd than that—particularly since Christ was sent to teach, not only the Jews, but the whole human race. So it was not enough for him to have a mind accommodated only to the opinions of the Jews; [he needed a mind accommodated] to the opinions and teachings universal to the human race, i.e., to common and true notions.<sup>17</sup>

[32] And of course, from the fact that God revealed himself immediately to Christ, *or* to his mind—and not, as he did to the Prophets, through words and images—the only thing we can understand is that Christ perceived truly, *or* understood, the things revealed. For what is perceived with a pure mind, without words and images, is understood.

[III/65] Christ, therefore, perceived the things revealed truly and adequately.

[33] If he ever prescribed them as laws, he did this because of the people's ignorance and stubbornness. So in this respect he acted in place of God, because he accommodated himself to the mentality of the people. That's why, although he spoke somewhat more clearly than

16. Spinoza reiterates his opposition to anthropomorphic conceptions of God. As ALM note, the term "attribute" is not used here in the technical sense it has in the *Ethics*. Cf. KV I, vii.

17. But in i, 22, Spinoza did seem to attribute supernatural knowledge to Christ.

the other Prophets, he still taught these revelations obscurely, and quite frequently through parables, especially when he was speaking to those to whom it was not yet given to understand the kingdom of heaven (see Matthew 13:10 etc.).<sup>18</sup> [34] But doubtless when he was speaking to those to whom it was given to know the mysteries of the heavens, 10 he taught things as eternal truths and did not prescribe them as laws. In this way he freed them from bondage to the law. Nevertheless, he [didn't abolish the law for them, but] confirmed and established it more firmly, and wrote it thoroughly in their hearts.

Paul also seems to teach this in certain passages. See Romans 7:6 15 and 3:28. [35] Still, he too did not wish to speak openly, but as he says (Romans 3:5 and 6:19) he speaks in a human manner. He says this explicitly when he calls God just. Doubtless it is also because of the weakness of the flesh that he ascribes mercy, grace, anger, etc., to God, and accommodates his words to the mentality of ordinary people, *or* 20 (as he also says in 1 Cor. 3:1–2) of men of the flesh.

[36] For Romans 9:18 teaches without reservation that God's anger and mercy do not depend on human works, but only on God's calling, i.e., on his will; next, Romans 3:28 teaches that no one becomes just 25 by the works of the law, but by faith alone, by which, of course, he understands nothing but a full consent of the heart; finally, Romans 8:9 teaches that no one becomes blessed unless he has in himself the mind of Christ, by which he perceives God's laws as eternal truths.

[37] From this we conclude

[i] that it is only because of the common people's power of understanding and a defect in their knowledge<sup>19</sup> that God is described as a lawgiver or 30 prince, and called just, merciful, etc.;

[ii] that God really acts and guides all things only from the necessity of his own nature and perfection; and finally,

[iii] that his decrees and volitions are eternal truths, and always involve necessity.

That is what I had decided to explain and show under the first [of the four headings enumerated in §22].

[III/66] [38] Let us turn then to the second question, and survey Holy Scripture to see what it teaches concerning the natural light and this

18. The passage cited is one which suggests that Jesus had an esoteric teaching intended to be understood only by the few. This seems difficult to reconcile with Spinoza's earlier claim that Christ was sent to teach the whole human race. Cf. iii, 45; iv, 31.

19. Reading *cognitionis* (with Wernham), in preference to Gebhardt's *cogitationis*. Cf. III/63/25–29. Glazemaker has *kennis*.

divine law. The first thing which strikes us is the story<sup>20</sup> of the first man, where it is related that God told Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil [Genesis 2:17]. This seems to mean that God told Adam to do and seek the good for the sake of the good, and not insofar as it is contrary to the evil, i.e., that he should seek the good from love of the good, and not from fear of evil.<sup>21</sup> For as we've already shown,<sup>22</sup> he who does good from a true knowledge and love of the good acts freely and with a constant heart, whereas he who acts from fear of evil is compelled by evil, acts like a slave, and lives under the command of another.

- 10 [39] And so this one thing which God told<sup>23</sup> Adam to do contains the whole divine natural law, and agrees absolutely with the dictate of the natural light. It would not be difficult to explain that whole story, or parable, of the first man from this foundation. But I prefer to put this to one side, not only because I cannot be absolutely certain that  
15 my explanation agrees with the writer's intention, but also because most people will not grant that this story is a parable, but maintain without qualification that it is a simple record of fact.

[40] It will be better, therefore, to call attention to other passages in Scripture, especially those which were composed by one who spoke from the power of the natural light, in which he surpassed all the other wise  
20 men of his age, and whose maxims the people have embraced as being as holy as those of the Prophets. I mean Solomon, who is commended in the sacred writings, not so much for his Prophecy and piety, as for his prudence and wisdom.

- [41] In his Proverbs Solomon calls the human understanding the fountain of true life and makes misfortune consist only in foolishness.  
25 Thus he says in 16:22 *מקור חיים שכל בעליו ומוסר איילים אולת* *Understanding is a fountain of life to its lord,*<sup>24\*</sup> *and the punishment of fools is folly.*<sup>25</sup> It

20. Gebhardt (V, 33) notes various authors who interpreted the story of the fall as a parable (e.g., Philo, *Allegory of the Laws* I, 100–108 [in Philo, *Works*]; Maimonides *Guide* II, 3), and others who interpreted it as historical (e.g., Ibn Ezra and Calvin).

21. For Spinoza's other discussions of the fall, E IV P68S, V P42, Letter 19 (IV/90), and TP ii, 6.

22. Perhaps the reference is to ii, 46–47, or iii, 45, or iv, 15.

23. Accepting Wernham's suggestion that we should read *praecepit*.

24. \*This is a Hebraism. He who has some thing or contains it in his nature is called the Lord of that thing. Thus a bird is called in Hebrew the Lord of wings, because it has wings. One who understands is called the Lord of the intellect, because he has understanding.

25. Bennett notes that the Vulgate and the King James Version render this verse: "the instruction of fools is folly." The ambiguity of the Hebrew (מוסר) makes this a possible translation, with the idea that it is foolish to listen to what fools teach. But more modern translations (e.g., the NRSV, the NJPS) tend to translate this verse as Spinoza does, with the idea that foolish people do foolish things, and that the foolishness of their behavior

should be noted here that in Hebrew true life is understood when *life* is used without qualification, as is evident from Deuteronomy 30:19. Therefore, he made the fruit of understanding consist only in true life, and punishment only in the privation of understanding. This agrees  
 30 completely with what we have noted above [III/62/17–21] concerning the natural divine law. Moreover, this same wise man teaches expressly that this fountain of life (*or*, as we have also shown, understanding alone)  
 [III/67] prescribes laws to the wise. For he says in Proverbs 13:14 תורת חכם מקור חיים *The Law*<sup>26</sup> *of the wise (is) the fountain of life*, i.e., as is evident from the text just adduced, understanding [is the fountain of life].

[42] Again, in 3:13 he teaches very explicitly that understanding makes man blessed and happy, and gives him true peace of mind. For  
 5 he says אשׁרי אדם מצא חכמה וכן אדם<sup>27</sup> יפיק תבונה וגו' ארך ימים בימינה בשמאלה *Blessed is the man who has found 'knowledge, and the son of the man who has brought forth understanding.* The reason for this (as he continues in vv. 16–17) is that *it gives length of days*<sup>28\*</sup> *directly, and indirectly wealth and honor; its ways* (i.e., those which  
 10 'knowledge indicates) *are pleasant, and all its paths are peace.* According to Solomon only the wise live with a constant and peaceful heart, unlike the impious, whose heart vacillates with opposite affects, to such an extent that (as Isaiah too says in 57:20) they have neither peace nor rest.

[43] Finally, what we must note most in these Proverbs of Solomon  
 15 are those in the second chapter, which confirm our opinion as clearly as possible. For 2:3 begins thus:

כי אם לבינה תקרא לתבונה תתן קולך וגו' אז תבין יראה יהוה ודעת אלהים תמצא כי יהוה  
 20 *for if you will call out for prudence, and lift up your voice for understanding, etc., then you will understand the fear of God, and you will find the 'knowledge* (or rather, love, for the word ידע *yadab* means both these things) *of God; for (NB) God grants wisdom, from his mouth 'knowledge and prudence* (flow out).

[44] By these words he indicates very clearly (i) that only wisdom, *or* understanding teaches us to fear God wisely, i.e., to worship God  
 25 with true religion; and he teaches (ii) that wisdom and 'knowledge flow from the mouth of God, and that God grants them. This is what we ourselves have shown above,<sup>29</sup> viz. that our understanding and our

is a sufficient punishment for their folly. Spinoza will return to this verse at the end of the chapter [§§49–50], and gloss it significantly.

26. So Spinoza translates תורה here, and so did the KJV. More recent translations prefer *teaching* (NRSV) or *instruction* (NJPS).

27. Where Spinoza has אדם, MT has simply אדם.

28. \*A Hebraism, which signifies nothing but life.

29. Cf. i, 4–5.

'knowledge depend only on the idea *or* knowledge of God, arise only from it, and are perfected only by it.

- [45] He proceeds next (in 2:9) to teach very explicitly that this  
 30 'knowledge contains the true Ethics and Politics and that they are deduced from it:<sup>30</sup>

אז תבין צדק ומשפט ומשרים כל מעגל טוב *then you will understand Justice, and Judgment, and the right ways, (and) every good path.* Not content with that, he continues: כי תבוא חכמה בלבך ודעת לנפשך ינעם מזמרה תשמור עליך תבונה *when 'knowledge shall enter into your heart, and wisdom shall be pleasant to you, then your providence<sup>31</sup>\* will watch over you and prudence will guard you.*  
 [III/68]

[46] All these things are entirely consistent with natural 'knowledge. For that knowledge teaches Ethics and true excellence, after we have acquired knowledge of things and tasted the excellence of 'knowledge.

- 5 So Solomon agrees that the happiness and peace of one who cultivates the natural understanding does not depend on the rule of fortune (i.e., on God's external aid), but chiefly on his internal excellence (i.e., on God's internal aid), because he preserves himself chiefly by being watchful, by acting, and by planning well.

- 10 [47] Finally, we must not by any means pass over that passage in Paul (Romans 1:20) where he says (as Tremellius<sup>32</sup> translates from the Syriac text): *for from the foundations of the world, God's hidden things are visible in his creatures through the understanding, and his power and divinity, which are to eternity; so they are without escape.*<sup>33</sup> [48] By this he indicates clearly

- 15 enough that everyone, by the natural light, clearly understands God's power and eternal divinity, from which he can know and deduce what he ought to pursue and what he ought to flee. Hence he concludes that no one has any escape and none can be excused by their ignorance, as they certainly could be, if he were speaking of the supernatural light,  
 20 and of the fleshly passion of Christ and his resurrection etc. [49] That's

30. Wernham suggests reading *ex ea eadem deduci*. Whether the text needs emendation or not, it certainly must be translated as if that is what we had.

31. \*Strictly speaking, מזמרה *mezima* means thought, deliberation, and vigilance.

32. On Tremellius, see the annotation at III/3.

33. In the NRSV the passage from Romans reads: "Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse." The prima facie difference between this more familiar translation and Tremellius's version may cause some to doubt whether Spinoza may have been misled in his understanding of Paul by a bad translation. But it's evident from his discussion of this text that he regards Tremellius's *sine effugio* (without escape) as entailing that the people so characterized are inexcusable. A more serious question is whether Spinoza's reading of Romans here is consistent with the position he ascribes to Paul in xvi, 6 and 53.

why he continues a bit further on (1:24) as follows: *for this reason God gave them up to the unclean lusts of their hearts etc.* to the end of the chapter, in verses which describe the vices of ignorance, and expound them as punishments for ignorance.

This agrees completely with that Proverb of Solomon we've already  
 25 cited, 16:22, according to which *ומוסר אוילים אולת* *the punishment of fools is foolishness*. [50] So it's no wonder that Paul says that evildoers are inexcusable. For as each one sows, so shall he reap [Galatians 6:7]. From evil deeds evils necessarily follow, unless they are wisely corrected, and from good deeds, goods necessarily follow, if they are accompanied by constancy of heart.<sup>34</sup> Scripture, therefore, commends, without reservation,  
 30 tion, both the natural light and the natural divine law. And with this I have finished the things I had proposed to treat in this chapter.

[III/69]

## CHAPTER V

*The Reason why ceremonies were instituted,  
 and on faith in historical narratives,  
 for what reason and for whom it is necessary*

[1] In the preceding Chapter we have shown that the divine law, which  
 5 renders men truly blessed, and teaches a true life, is universal to all men. We have deduced this from human nature in such a way that we must think that it itself is innate to, and as it were, written in the human mind.  
 [2] But ceremonies—at least those treated in the Old Testament—were  
 instituted only for the Hebrews, and were so adapted to their state that  
 10 for the most part they could be performed only by the whole society, not by each person. So it's certain that they do not pertain to the divine law, and make no contribution to blessedness and virtue, but concern only the election of the Hebrews—i.e., as we have shown in Ch. 3 [§§6–21],  
 15 only the temporal happiness of the body and the peace of the state. For that reason, they could be useful only so long as their state lasted.  
 [3] Therefore, if the Old Testament referred those ceremonies to the law of God, that was only because they were instituted by revelation or from revealed foundations. But because most Theologians do not

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34. Note the qualifications Spinoza attaches to the doctrine that as we sow, so shall we reap. The generalizations that good deeds lead to good results, and evil deeds to bad results, hold only subject to certain conditions.

20 value reason highly, even when it is very solid, I want to prove what we have just shown by the authority of Scripture as well. Then, for greater lucidity, I want to show why and how the ceremonies served to stabilize and preserve the Jewish state.

[4] [As for the first point,] Isaiah teaches nothing more clearly than that the divine law, taken without qualification, means that universal  
25 law which consists in the true manner of living, but not in ceremonies. For when the Prophet calls his nation to hear the divine Law from him (Isaiah 1:10), he first excludes from it all kinds of sacrifices, and then all festivals. Only then does he teach the law itself (see vv. 16–17),  
30 summing it up briefly as consisting in the purification of the heart, in the performance (*or* habitual practice) of virtue (*or* of good actions), and finally, in giving aid to the poor.<sup>1</sup>

[5] No less clear is the testimony of Psalm 40:7, 9,<sup>2</sup> for here the Psalmist addresses God:

[III/70] זבח ומנחה לא חפצת אונים כרית לי עולה וחטאה לא שאלת לעשות רצונך אלהי חפצתי  
יזבח ומנחה לא חפצת אונים כרית לי עולה וחטאה לא שאלת לעשות רצונך אלהי חפצתי  
you did not want sacrifice and offering, you have opened my ears,<sup>3</sup>\* you did not ask for a burnt offering or an offering for sin; I have wanted to follow your will, my God; for your law is in my inmost parts.

5 Therefore, he calls the law of God only that which is written in the inmost parts, or in the mind, and he excludes ceremonies from it. For they are good only by institution, and not by nature; so they are not written in minds. In addition to these there are still other passages in Scripture which testify to the same thing. But it's enough to have mentioned these two.

[6] [As for the second point,] Scripture itself also establishes that ceremonies contribute nothing to blessedness, but only concern the  
10 temporal prosperity of the state. For it promises nothing in return for ceremonies except the advantages and pleasures of the body, and promises blessedness only in return for following the universal divine law. For in the five books commonly attributed to Moses<sup>4</sup> nothing else is promised (as we have said above [iii, 19]) than this temporal

1. Isa. 1:16–17 reads: “Wash yourselves clean; put your evil doings away from my sight. Cease to do evil; learn to do good. Devote yourself to justice; aid the wronged; uphold the rights of the orphan; defend the cause of the widow” (NJPS).

2. Spinoza uses the numbering of the Hebrew Bible for what in the English versions are vv. 6 and 8. The Hebrew which Spinoza translates here as *lex* (“law”), *torah*, can also be translated “teaching,” and is so translated in the NJPS translation.

3. \*A phrase meaning perception.

4. The first hint, I think, that Spinoza will question the attribution of those books to Moses.



15 prosperity, i.e., honors *or* reputation, victories, wealth, pleasures and health.

[7] And although those five books contain, in addition to ceremonies, many precepts related to morals, nevertheless they do not contain those precepts as moral teachings, universal to all men, but as commands especially accommodated to the grasp and mentality of the Hebrew nation, and so as commands which concern only the advantage of the state. For example, Moses does not teach the Jews as a teacher or Prophet that they should not kill or steal, but commands these things as a lawgiver and prince. For he does not prove these teachings by reason, but adds  
20 a penalty to the commands, which can and must vary according to the mentality of each nation, as experience has sufficiently taught.

[8] Similarly, the command not to commit adultery concerns only the advantage of the republic and the state. For if he had wanted to teach this as a moral teaching, which concerns not only the advantage of the republic, but also the peace of mind and true blessedness of  
30 each person, he would not condemn only the external action, but also the consent of the mind itself, as Christ did, who taught only universal teachings (see Matthew 5:28).<sup>5</sup> That's why Christ promises a spiritual reward, not, as Moses does, a corporeal one. [9] For as I've said,<sup>6</sup> Christ  
[III/71] was sent, not to preserve the state and to institute laws, but to teach the one universal law.

From this we easily understand that Christ did not at all repeal the law of Moses, since he didn't want to introduce any new laws into the republic, nor was he concerned about anything but teaching moral  
5 lessons, and distinguishing them from the laws of the Republic. This was important to him mainly because of the ignorance of the Pharisees, who thought that one who lived blessedly was one who observed the legislation of the Republic, *or* the law of Moses, whereas that law, as we've said [iv, 29–30], was concerned only with the Republic, and did not serve so much to teach the Hebrews as to compel them.

10 [10] But let's return to our theme, and cite other passages in Scripture which promise nothing more than corporeal advantages in return for ceremonies, and blessedness only in return for adhering to the universal divine law. Among the Prophets no one taught this more clearly than Isaiah. For in ch. 58, after he has condemned hypocrisy, he commends

5. Matt. 5:28 reads: "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (NRSV). Sanders (1993, 201–4) has argued that we need to put the "idealistic perfectionism" of passages like this into context, noting that it seems to be localized in the gospel of Matthew, and to be inconsistent with the compassion toward human frailty found elsewhere in the teachings of Jesus.

6. I believe the reference is to iv, 31–34.

15 freedom and loving-kindness toward oneself and one's neighbor.<sup>7</sup> In return for these he promises that

אז יבקע כשחר אורך וארוכתך מהרה תצמח והלך לפניך צדקך כבוד יהוה יאסף  
*then your light will burst forth like the dawn, and your health will blossom out immediately, and your justice will go before you, and the glory of God will gather\*\* you etc.* [v. 8].

After this he commends the sabbath also, and in return for diligence  
 20 in observing it, he promises that

אז תתענג על יהוה והרכבתך על במותי ארץ והאכלתיך נחלת יעקב אביך כי פי יהוה דבר  
*then you will take pleasure<sup>9</sup>\* in God, and I shall make you ride<sup>10</sup>\* on the high places of the earth, and I shall make you eat the heritage of Jacob, your father, as the mouth of Yabweb has spoken* [v. 14].

We see, therefore, that in return for freedom and loving-kindness the  
 25 Prophet promises a sound mind in a sound body, and the glory of God even after death,<sup>11</sup> but that in return for ceremonies he promises nothing except the security of the state, prosperity and bodily good fortune.

[11] In Psalms 15 and 24 there is no mention of ceremonies, but only of moral teachings, because in those Psalms it is only a question of blessedness, and that alone is held out as an inducement, although

7. *hic enim cap. 58., postquam hypocrisin damnavit, libertatem, et charitatem erga se, et proximum commendat.* This sentence is puzzling, partly because of the reference to *libertas*. Totaro suggests that Spinoza may have in mind Isa. 58:6, which urges the people of Israel to free the workers they have oppressed. But she also suggests that *libertas* may have the broader meaning it had acquired by the seventeenth century, which includes what would classically have been called *liberalitas* (liberality or generosity). Cf. Isa. 58:7, with its call to the people of Israel to share their bread with the hungry, bring the homeless into their homes, and clothe the naked.

Also puzzling is the apparent injunction to love oneself (commending *charitas erga se*). Isaiah does not seem to think that the people suffer from a deficit of self-love, but that their self-love fails to motivate the behavior God really wants, not ritual, but care for others. We might propose taking the reflexive *se* to have reciprocal force, so that the injunction is to love one another. But then the reference to loving one's neighbor seems redundant.

8. \*A Hebraism by which the time of death is meant. *To be gathered unto one's people* means to die. See Gen. 49:29, 33. [Spinoza is at odds with the major modern translations, which interpret the verb אסף here as meaning *to be one's rearguard*, and not, as Spinoza does, *to gather* or *collect* (with a reference to the custom of gathering a person's bones for burial with those of his ancestors). So the NJPS has for the last verse: "The presence of the LORD shall be your rearguard." The NRSV and NIV are similar. I owe this information to John Huddleston. Cf. Isa. 52:12, where the HCSB commentary suggests a contrast with the exodus.]

9. \*This means *to take pleasure in honorably*, as is also said in Dutch: *met Godt en met eere* [, with God and with honor].

10. \*This means control, as to handle a horse by the reins.

11. So here Spinoza finds a reference to reward in the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible (though apparently he bases this on a misreading of Isaiah).

30 in metaphors. For it is certain that by the mount of God, and his tents,  
and the inhabitation of these, the Psalmist understands blessedness and  
[III/72] peace of mind, not the mount of Jerusalem or the tent of Moses.<sup>12</sup> For  
no one inhabited these places, nor did anyone administer them, except  
members of the tribe of Levi.

[12] Next, all the maxims of Solomon which I mentioned in the  
preceding chapter promise true blessedness in return only for the  
cultivation of understanding and wisdom. That is, they promise that  
5 in this way we will at last understand the fear of God, and discover  
the 'knowledge of God.

[13] But it's evident from Jeremiah that after the destruction of their  
state the Hebrews are not bound to perform ceremonies. When he  
has seen that the destruction of the city is at hand, and is predicting  
it, he says *God loves only those who know and understand that he exercises*  
10 *compassion, judgment, and justice in the world; and so hereafter only those*  
*who know these things are to be viewed as worthy of praise* (see Jeremiah  
9:23),<sup>13</sup> as if to say that after the destruction of the city God requires  
nothing special of the Jews, and that henceforth he will not ask of them  
anything beyond the natural law which binds all mortals.

15 [14] The New Testament completely proves this. For as we have said,  
it teaches only moral lessons, and promises the kingdom of heaven in  
return for adherence to them. Moreover, after the Gospel began to be  
preached also to other nations, who were bound by the legislation of  
another Republic, the Apostles set aside ceremonies.

It's true that the Pharisees retained them, or at least many of them,  
20 after they lost their state; but they did this more in a spirit of opposing  
the Christians than to please God. [15] For after the first destruction of  
the city, when they were led as captives to Babylon, because (so far as I  
know) they were not then divided into sects, they immediately neglected  
ceremonies. Indeed, they said good-bye to the whole law of Moses,  
consigned the legislation of their country to oblivion, as completely  
25 superfluous, and began to mix with the other nations. Ezra and Nehemiah  
establish this more than adequately.<sup>14</sup> So there is no doubt that after their  
state was dissolved the Jews were no more bound by the law of Moses  
than they were before their social order and Republic began. For before

12. See Ps. 15:1 and Ps. 24:3.

13. Though in italics in the text, this is more a paraphrase than a quote. The verse  
cited reads: "But only in this should one glory: in his earnest devotion to Me. For I the  
Lord act with kindness, justice and equity in the world; for in these I delight" (NJPS).  
The verses which follow reject the importance of physical circumcision, in favor of a  
circumcision of the heart.

14. See Ezra 9 and Neh. 13.

the exodus from Egypt, when they lived among other nations, they had  
 30 no laws peculiar to themselves, and were not bound by any law, except  
 natural law and, no doubt, the legislation of the Republic in which they  
 were living (insofar as it was not contrary to divine natural law).

[16] As for the fact that the Patriarchs sacrificed to God, I think  
 they did that to rouse their hearts more to devotion; their hearts were  
 accustomed to sacrifices from childhood. For from the time of Enosh  
 [III/73] all men had become completely accustomed to sacrifices,<sup>15</sup> so that it was  
 only by them that they were most roused to devotion. So the Patriarchs  
 sacrificed to God, not because some divine legislation commanded it,  
 nor because they had been instructed in the universal foundations of  
 divine law, but only because it was the custom at that time. If they did  
 5 it because of someone's command, that command was nothing but the  
 legislation of the republic in which they were living, by which they  
 were also bound (as we have already noted here, and also in Ch. 3,  
 when we spoke about Melchizedek).<sup>16</sup>

[17] With this I think I have proven my opinion by the authority  
 10 of Scripture. It remains now to show how and why ceremonies served  
 to preserve and stabilize the Hebrews' state. I shall show this from  
 universal foundations, as briefly as I can.

[18] A social order is very useful, and even most necessary, not only  
 for living securely from enemies, but also for doing many things more  
 15 easily. For if men were not willing to give mutual assistance to one  
 another, they would lack both skill and time to sustain and preserve  
 themselves as far as possible. [19] Not all men are equally capable of  
 all things, and no one would be able to provide the things which a man  
 alone needs most. Everyone, I say, would lack both the strength and  
 20 the time, if he alone had to plow, to sow, to reap, to grind, to cook, to  
 weave, to sew, and to do the many other things necessary to support  
 life—not to mention now the arts and sciences which are also supremely  
 necessary for the perfection of human nature and for its blessedness.  
 [20] For we see that those who live barbarously, without an organized  
 25 community, lead a wretched and almost brutal life, and that still it is  
 not without mutual assistance, such as it is, that they are able to provide  
 themselves with the few wretched and crude things they have.<sup>17</sup>

15. Gen. 4:26, which does not specifically mention sacrifices, reports that in the time  
 of Enosh (the grandson of Adam through Seth) people began to invoke Yahweh by name.  
 According to a different tradition, preserved in Exod. 3:13–15, 6:2–3, the name Yahweh  
 was introduced in the time of Moses. See the discussion in Anchor Genesis, 37–38.

16. In iii, 23–24.

17. The considerations Spinoza introduces here will recur in xvi, 13, as part of his  
 argument for a social contract. They occur also in Hobbes. Cf. *Leviathan* xiii, 9, 14.

Now if nature had so constituted men that they desired nothing except what true reason teaches them to desire, then of course a society could exist without laws; in that case it would be completely sufficient  
 30 to teach men true moral lessons, so that they would do voluntarily, wholeheartedly, and in a manner worthy of a free man, what is really useful. [21] But human nature is not constituted like that at all. It's true that everyone seeks his own advantage—but people want things and judge them useful, not by the dictate of sound reason, but for the most part only from immoderate desire and because they are carried away by affects of mind which take no account of the future and of other  
 [III/74] things. [22] That's why no society can continue in existence without authority and force, and hence, laws which moderate and restrain men's immoderate desires and unchecked impulses.

Nevertheless, human nature does not allow itself to be compelled in everything. As the Tragic poet, Seneca, says, no one has sustained a  
 5 violent rule for long; moderate ones last.<sup>18</sup> For as long as men act only from fear, they act very unwillingly, and don't recognize the advantage, even the necessity, of doing what they're doing. All they care about is saving their necks, and avoiding punishment. They can only rejoice whenever some evil or harm happens to their ruler, however much evil it may bring them; they can't help wanting all sorts of bad things to  
 10 happen to him; when they can, they help to bring them about. Again, the hardest thing for them to endure is being subservient to their equals, and being governed by them. Finally, nothing is more difficult than to take freedom away from men again, once it has been granted.

[23] From these [foundations] it follows, first, that either the whole society should hold sovereignty as a body (if this can be done), so that  
 15 everyone is bound to be subject to himself, and no one is bound to be subject to his equal—or else, if a few men have sovereignty, or one man alone, he ought to have something above ordinary human nature. If he does not surpass ordinary human nature, he at least must strive with all his might to persuade the common people of this.

[24] Secondly, [it follows from the foundations that] in each state the laws must be so instituted that men are checked not so much by fear as by the hope of some good they desire very much. For in this  
 20 way everyone will do his duty eagerly.

[25] Finally, since obedience consists in someone's carrying out a command solely on the authority of the person who commands it, it

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18. Seneca, *Troades* 258–59, quoted again at III/194/15. As ALM note, Spinoza's Latin teacher, Van den Enden, had his students put on performances, not only of Terence's comedies, but also of Seneca's tragedies.

follows that obedience has no place in a social order where sovereignty is in the hands of everyone and laws are enacted by common consent, and that whether the laws in such a social order are increased or diminished, the people nevertheless remains equally free, because it does not act from the authority of someone else, but by its own consent. But the opposite happens where one person alone holds sovereignty absolutely. For everyone carries out the commands of the state solely because of the authority of one person, with the result that, unless they have been educated from the beginning to hang on the words of the ruler, it will be difficult for him to institute new laws when it is necessary, and to take away a freedom once it has been granted to the people.

[26] Let us now apply these general considerations to the Hebrew republic.<sup>19</sup> When they first left Egypt, they were no longer bound by the legislation of any other nation; so they were permitted, as they [III/75] wished, to enact new laws *or* to establish new legislation, and to have a state wherever they wished, and to occupy what lands they wished. [27] Nevertheless, they were quite incapable of establishing legislation wisely and keeping the sovereignty in their own hands, as a body. Almost all of them were unsophisticated in their mentality and weakened by wretched bondage. Therefore, the sovereignty had to remain in the hands of one person only, who would command the others, compel them by force, and finally, who would prescribe laws and afterward interpret them.

[28] But Moses was easily able to retain this sovereignty, because he excelled the others in divine power, persuaded the people that he had it, and showed this by a great deal of evidence (see Exodus 14:29, 19:9). So through a divine power in which he was preeminent, he established legislation and prescribed it to the people. But in these matters he took the greatest care that the people should do their duty, not so much from fear, as voluntarily.<sup>20</sup> Two things in particular forced this on him: the stubborn mentality of the people (because it would not allow itself to be compelled solely by force) and the threat of war. For if war is to go well, it is better to encourage the soldiers than to frighten them with penalties and threats. In this way they will be eager to distinguish themselves for excellence and nobility of spirit rather than merely to avoid punishment.

[29] That's why Moses, by divine power and command, introduced religion into the Republic, so that the people would do their duty

19. Cf. xvii, 26–40.

20. ALM call attention to a passage in Terence's *Adelphi*, 74–75, another of the Latin authors whose plays Van den Enden had his students perform. Cf. also TP x, 7.

not so much from fear as from devotion. He also placed them under obligation with benefits, and in the name of God promised them many things in the future. Moreover, the laws he enacted were not very severe. Anyone who has concerned himself with them will easily grant that, particularly if he has attended to the circumstances which were  
 25 required to condemn someone as guilty.<sup>21</sup>

[30] Finally, in order that the people, who were not capable of being their own masters, should hang on the words of its ruler, he did not permit these men, accustomed as they were to bondage, to act just as they pleased. For the people could do nothing without being bound at the same time to remember the law, and to carry out commands which depended only on the will of the ruler. For it was not at their  
 30 own pleasure, but according to a fixed and determinate command of the law, that they were permitted to plow, to sow, to reap.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, they were not permitted to eat anything, to dress, to shave their head or beard, to rejoice, or to do absolutely anything, except according to the orders and commandments prescribed in the laws. This was not all. They were also bound to have on the doorposts, on their hands,  
 [III/76] and between their eyes, certain signs, which always reminded them of the need for obedience.<sup>23</sup>

[31] This, then, was the object of the ceremonies: that men should do nothing by their own decision, but everything according to the command of someone else, and that they should confess, both by constantly repeated actions and by meditations, that they were not their own master in anything, but were completely subjected to some-  
 5 one else's control. From all this it is established, more clearly than by broad daylight, that ceremonies contribute nothing to blessedness, and that those of the Old Testament, indeed, the whole law of Moses, was concerned with nothing but the Hebrew state, and consequently, with nothing but corporeal advantages.<sup>24</sup>

[32] As for the Christian ceremonies, viz., Baptism, the lord's Supper, the festivals, public statements, and whatever others there may be  
 10 which are and always have been common to all Christianity, if Christ or the Apostles ever instituted these (which so far I do not find to be sufficiently established), they were instituted only as external signs of

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21. Cf. Deut. 19:15, according to which two or more witnesses are required for conviction for any crime.

22. Cf. Deut. 22:9–10.

23. Cf. Deut. 6:8–9.

24. This section of the TTP would thus provide one way for Spinoza to defend one of the opinions for which he was excommunicated, his contention that the Law of Moses was not the true law. Cf. the Editorial Preface to the TTP, pp. 49–50, 52–53.



the universal Church, not as things which contribute to blessedness or have any holiness in them.<sup>25</sup>

- 15 [33] So though these ceremonies were not instituted with respect to a state, still they were instituted only with respect to the whole Society.<sup>26</sup> So someone who lives alone is not bound by them at all. Indeed, someone who lives in a state where the Christian religion is forbidden is bound to abstain from these ceremonies. But he can still live blessedly.
- 20 [34] We have an example of this in Japan, where the Christian religion is forbidden, and the Dutch who live there are bound by a command of the East India Company to abstain from all external worship.<sup>27</sup>

I do not intend to prove this now by any other authority, though it would not be difficult to deduce this too from the fundamental principles  
 25 of the New Testament, and perhaps to show it also by clear evidence. Nevertheless I prefer to put these things to one side, because I am anxious to get to other matters. So I proceed to the second question I have decided to discuss in this chapter: for whom is faith in the historical narratives contained in Scriptures necessary? and why? To investigate this by the natural light, it seems that we should proceed as follows.

- 30 [35] If someone wants to persuade or dissuade men of something not known through itself, to get them to embrace it he must deduce it from things which have been granted, and convince them either by experience or by reason, viz., either from things they have experienced through the senses as happening in nature, or from intellectual axioms known through themselves. But unless the experience is such that it

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25. In rejecting these Christian ceremonies, Spinoza's position resembles that of the Quakers. Cf. Barbour 2005.

26. That is, as I take it, the Christian religious community, which lacks the political structure characteristic of a state, and transcends national boundaries.

27. Catholic missionaries had been active in Japan since the mid-sixteenth century and the Dutch established a trading post there early in the seventeenth century. But the Tokugawa shoguns, aware of the role of missionaries in the Spanish and Portuguese colonialism in Asia, came to view them as a threat to their rule. They banned Christianity, expelled the missionaries, and adopted a policy of national seclusion. From 1633 until the nineteenth century, Japanese subjects were prohibited from traveling abroad. Foreign contact was limited to a few Chinese and Dutch merchants allowed to trade through the port of Nagasaki, on the condition that they would refrain from proselytizing and from publicly practicing Christianity. When this agreement became known in the Netherlands, the Calvinist clergy, mindful of the willingness of the early Christians to suffer martyrdom in the Roman Empire, strongly opposed it. During the French invasion of the Dutch Republic in the 1670s, Jean-Baptiste Stoupe, a Swiss Calvinist in the service of Louis XIV, sought to justify the participation of Protestants in a Catholic war against a Protestant country on the ground that the Dutch Republic was not truly a Protestant country. He cited both the agreement with Japan and the "unlimited freedom" the Republic extended to all sorts of religions (and to freethinkers like Spinoza). For further detail, see Stoupe 1673; ALM, 727–28, n. 29; and Gebhardt V, 34–36. Spinoza will refer to this agreement again in xvi, 67.

[III/77] is clearly and distinctly understood, even though it convinces a man, it will still not be able to affect his intellect and disperse its clouds as much as when the thing to be taught is deduced solely from intellectual axioms, i.e., solely by the power of the intellect and its order in perceiving. This is particularly true if it is a question of a spiritual  
5 thing, which does not in any way fall under the senses.

[36] But because deducing a thing solely from intellectual notions very often requires a long chain of perceptions, plus extreme caution, mental perceptiveness, and restraint—all of which are rarely found in men—men would rather be taught by experience than deduce all their  
10 perceptions from a few axioms and connect them together.

[37] It follows that if someone wants to teach a doctrine to a whole nation—not to mention the whole human race—and wants everyone to understand him in every respect, he is bound to prove his doctrine solely by experience, and for the most part to accommodate his arguments and the definitions of his teaching to the power of understanding of ordinary people, who form the greatest part of the human race.  
15 He should not connect his arguments, or give definitions, according as they serve to connect his arguments better. Otherwise he will write only for the learned, i.e., he will be intelligible only to very few men, compared with the rest.

[38] Since the whole of Scripture was revealed first for the use of a whole nation, and eventually for the use of the whole human race, the things it contains must necessarily have been accommodated chiefly to ordinary people's power of understanding and proved by experience alone. Let us explain this matter more clearly. The strictly speculative matters Scripture wishes to teach<sup>28</sup> are chiefly these:

25 there is a God, *or* a being who has made all things, who directs and sustains them with supreme wisdom, and who takes the greatest care of those men who live piously and honorably. As for the others, he inflicts many punishments on them and separates them from the good.

[39] Scripture proves these teachings solely by experience, i.e., by  
30 the narratives it relates. It does not give any definitions of these things, but accommodates all its words and arguments to ordinary people's power of understanding. And although experience cannot give any clear knowledge of these things, or teach what God is, and how he sustains and directs all things, and how he takes care of men,<sup>29</sup> still it

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28. Here we get a first sketch of the minimum creed Spinoza will develop later in xii, 34–38, and xiv, 5–34.

29. Questions Spinoza addressed earlier in iii, 7–11.

[III/78] can teach and enlighten men enough to imprint obedience and devotion on their hearts.

[40] This establishes clearly enough, I think, who needs faith in the historical narratives contained in Scripture, and why. From what we have just shown it follows with utmost clarity that acquaintance with them, and faith in them, is most necessary for the common people, 5 whose mentality is not able to perceive things clearly and distinctly.

Next it follows that whoever denies these narratives because he does not believe that there is a God, or that God provides for things and for men, is impious. On the other hand, someone who is not familiar with them, and nevertheless knows by the natural light that God exists, and the other things we have just mentioned [in §38], and moreover has a 10 true manner of living, that person is completely blessed.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, he is more blessed than the common people, because in addition to true opinions, he has a clear and distinct conception.

[41] Finally, it follows that if someone is not familiar with these historical narratives in Scripture and does not know anything by the natural light, even if he is not impious *or* stubborn, still he is devoid of human feeling, and almost a beast. He does not have any of God's gift.

15 But note: when we say that acquaintance with historical narratives is very necessary for the common people, we do not mean acquaintance with absolutely all the narratives contained in Scripture, but only with the main ones, which by themselves, without the others, show the teaching we have just mentioned more clearly, and are most capable 20 of moving men's hearts. [42] For if all the Scriptural narratives were necessary to prove its teaching, and no conclusion could be drawn without a general consideration of absolutely all the stories contained in it,<sup>31</sup> then surely the demonstration of the teaching and the conclusion would surpass, not only the grasp and powers of ordinary people, 25 but those of all men without exception. For who could attend all at once to so many narratives, to so many circumstances, and to so many parts of the teaching which would have to be drawn from so many and such different stories?

[43] For my part, I cannot believe that the men who left us the Scripture as we have it were so plentifully supplied with understanding 30 that they could find such a demonstration; much less can I believe that the teaching of Scripture could not be understood except by someone who had heard the quarrels of Isaac, the advice given by Achitophel

30. Here Spinoza sets himself against the exclusivism affirmed in such New Testament passages as John 3:18, 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 3:9–28, 5:12–21; etc. Cf. Letter 76 and the discussion of it in Curley 2010.

31. As Maimonides had argued, *Guide* III, 50.

to Absalom, the civil war of the Jews and the Israelites, and other Chronicles of that kind. Nor can I believe that that teaching could not be demonstrated as easily to the first Jews, who lived in the time of Moses, as it could to those who lived in the time of Ezra. But more of this later.

[44] The common people, then, are bound to know only those narratives which are most able to move their hearts to obedience and devotion. But they themselves are not very well able to make a judgment [about which narratives those are], because they take more pleasure in the narration, and in the particular and unexpected outcomes, than they do in what the narratives teach. So, in addition to reading the narratives, they need Pastors *or* ministers of the Church as well, who will teach them according to the weakness of their understanding.

[45] But not to wander from our subject, let us conclude with what we mainly meant to show, viz. that faith in historical narratives, whatever in the end those narratives may be, does not pertain to the divine law and does not render men more blessed in itself, and does not have any utility except in relation to teaching. It is only in this respect that some narratives can be better than others.

[46] So the narratives contained in the Old and New Testaments are better than the other, secular narratives, and among the [scriptural narratives], some are better than others, in proportion as the opinions which follow from them are salutary. Hence, if someone has read the narratives of Holy Scripture, and has had faith in them in every respect, and has nevertheless not attended to the lesson Scripture intends to teach with those stories, nor improved his life, it is just the same as if he had read the Koran, or the dramas of the Poets, or even the ordinary Chronicles, with the same attention as the common people usually give to these things. On the other hand, as we have said, someone who is completely unfamiliar with these narratives, and nevertheless has salutary opinions and a true manner of living, is completely blessed and really has the Spirit of Christ in him.<sup>32</sup>

[47] But the Jews think just the opposite.<sup>33</sup> For they maintain that true opinions and a true manner of living contribute nothing to blessedness so

32. So Spinoza's view is pluralistic, in the sense that he thinks no one religious book which claims to offer a unique route to salvation actually does that.

33. Maimonides' position was not universal among Jews even in the medieval period. But the issue was an important one in the Amsterdam Jewish community of Spinoza's day, and seems to have been one of the issues which separated Spinoza and Juan de Prado from that community. On this see Kaplan 1989, 122–78. Since the Enlightenment a more pluralistic understanding of the relation of Judaism to other religions has been common (though not universal). In the eighteenth century Moses Mendelssohn is particularly close to Spinoza's view. On history of this problem, see Porton 2005.

long as men embrace them only by the natural light and not as teachings revealed prophetically to Moses. In ch. 8 of Kings, law 11, Maimonides is bold enough to affirm this openly, in these words: *כל המקבל שבע מצות* ונזהר לעשותן הרי זה מחסידי אומות העולם ויש לו חלק לעולם הבא : והוא שיקבל אותן ויעשה אותן מפני שצוה בהן הקדוש ברוך הוא בתורה והודיענו על ידי משה רבינו שבני נח מקודם נצטוו בהן אבל אם עשהו מפני הכרע הדעת אין זה גר תושב ואינו מחסידי אומות *everyone who has accepted the seven precepts*<sup>34\*</sup> *and has carried them out diligently is among the pious of the Nations, and will inherit the world to come, that is, provided he has accepted them and carried them out because God commanded them in the law and because he revealed to us through Moses that previously he gave the same precepts to the sons of Noah; but if he*<sup>35</sup> *has carried them out because he has been led by reason, he is not a resident,*<sup>35</sup> *nor to be numbered among the pious of the Nations, nor among their wise men.*<sup>36</sup>

[48] Those are the words of Maimonides. And Rabbi Joseph, son of Shem Tov, adds in his book, *Kevod Elohim, or Glory of God*,<sup>37</sup> that even if Aristotle (who he thinks wrote the best Ethics, and whom he esteems above all others) had included all the things which concern the true Ethics, and which he has embraced in his own Ethics, but had carried out all of them diligently, this still could not have helped him attain salvation. For he did not embrace the things he teaches as divine teachings, prophetically revealed, but only as dictates of reason.

34. \*The Jews think that God gave Noah seven precepts and that it is only by those precepts that all nations are bound; but they think he gave a great many others as well to the Hebrew nation alone, so as to make it more blessed than the others. [The seven precepts which Spinoza says God is thought to have given to Noah (known as the Noachide laws) include prohibitions of idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, theft, eating a limb torn from a living animal, and an injunction to establish a legal system. There has been debate within the Jewish tradition as to whether the Noachide laws constituted a formulation of natural law or were intended only to govern the conduct of non-Jews living under Jewish jurisdiction. For further detail, see Schwarzschild et al. 2007.]

35. Spinoza uses the term *incola*, resident, or inhabitant, to translate a Hebrew phrase which normally designates a resident alien, someone who has the right to live in a political community without being a citizen.

36. See the Mishneh Torah, Hilkot Melakim 8, 11, and the discussions of this passage in Fox 1990, 130–32, and Kaplan 1989, 118–22. The text Spinoza translates appears to be corrupt. Modern editions of Maimonides have a reading in which the last clause would be translated “but among their wise men.” ALM, 729–30, n. 40, helpfully summarizes the debate among Joel, Cohen, and Strauss about whether Maimonides’ position on the righteous among the gentiles is truly representative of the Jewish tradition. See also Porton 2005.

37. Joseph ben Shem Tov (c. 1400–c. 1460) was a philosopher and physician in the court of two Spanish kings, John II and Henry IV. His *Kevod Elohim* (written in 1442, but not published until 1556) argued that Aristotle’s views could be reconciled with the teachings of the Torah, and that philosophical inquiry could be useful to religion. A Jew who philosophizes is better than one who practices his religious duties blindly. But he did not think it was necessary to understand philosophy or the reasons for the divine commandments in order to practice them.

[49] But I think anyone who reads these things attentively will find  
 15 it clear enough that these are all just inventions, unsupported either by  
 any reasons or by the authority of Scripture. To refute this position,  
 it's enough to give an account of it. Nor do I intend here to refute  
 the opinion of those who maintain that the natural light cannot teach  
 anything sound about the things bearing on true salvation. For a per-  
 20 son who does not grant himself any sound reason can not prove this  
 by any reason.<sup>38</sup> And if they seek to recommend themselves as having  
 something beyond reason, that is a mere invention, and far beneath  
 reason, which their ordinary way of living has already sufficiently shown.

[50] But there is no need to speak more openly about these people.  
 I add only this: that we cannot know anyone except by his works.  
 25 Therefore, if a man is rich in these fruits,<sup>39</sup> loving-kindness, gladness,  
 peace, patience, beneficence, goodness, good faith, gentleness, and self-  
 restraint—against which (as Paul says in Galatians 5:22) there is no  
 law—whether he has been taught only by reason or only by Scripture,  
 he has truly been taught by God and is completely blessed. With this  
 30 I have finished everything I had decided to say about the divine law.

[III/81]

## CHAPTER VI

### *On Miracles*

[1] Just as men are in the habit of calling divine whatever 'knowledge  
 surpasses the human power of understanding, so they've become accus-  
 5 tomed to call a work divine, *or* a work of God, if its cause is commonly  
 not known. For the common people think God's power and providence  
 are established most clearly when they see something unusual happen  
 in nature, which is contrary to the opinion they have of nature from  
 custom. This is particularly so if the event has turned out to their profit  
 10 or advantage. They judge that nothing can prove God's existence more  
 clearly than that nature, as they think, does not maintain its order.

That's why these people think someone who explains things and  
 miracles by their natural causes, or who strives to understand them,  
 eliminates God, or at least God's providence. [2] For they think that  
 God does nothing so long as nature acts according to its usual order.  
 15 Conversely, they think the power of nature and natural causes are inactive

38. Another reference to the Calvinists. Cf. Preface, §17.

39. Alluding to a proverb found in the gospels, e.g., Matt. 7:16, 20; 12:33.

so long as God acts. So they imagine two powers numerically distinct from one another, the power of God and the power of natural things. Nevertheless, they think the power of natural things is determined by God in a certain way—or (as most think today instead) created.

- 20 [3] But what do they understand by these two powers, and by God and nature? They don't know, of course, except that they imagine God's power as the rule of a certain Royal majesty, whereas they imagine nature's power as force and impulse. So the common people call unusual works of nature miracles, *or* works of God. Partly from devotion, partly  
 25 from a desire to oppose those who cultivate the natural sciences, they don't want to know the natural causes of things. They long to hear only the things they're most ignorant of, which they're most amazed by. [4] They can worship God and relate all things to his rule and will only by eliminating natural causes and imagining events outside the  
 30 order of nature. They marvel most at the power of God when they imagine the power of nature as if it were subjected to God's control.

This [attitude] seems to have originated with the earliest Jews. The Gentiles of their time worshipped visible Gods, such as the Sun, the Moon, the Earth, Water, Air, etc. To prove them wrong and to show  
 [III/82] them that those Gods were weak and inconstant, *or* changeable, and under the rule of an invisible God, the Jews related their miracles, by which they tried to show that the whole of nature was directed only for their advantage, by the command of the God they worshipped. This was so pleasing to men that to this day they haven't ceased to feign miracles, so that they might be believed to be dearer to God than the  
 5 rest, and the final cause on account of which God has created, and continually directs, all things.

- [5] What do the common people not foolishly claim for themselves, because they have no sound concept either of God or of nature, because they confuse God's decrees with men's decisions, and finally, because  
 10 they posit a nature so limited that they believe man to be its chief part! But that's enough about the opinions and prejudices of the common people regarding Nature and miracles. [6] To treat this topic in proper order, I'll show

- (i) that nothing happens contrary to nature, but that it preserves an eternal, fixed and immutable order [§§7–12]; at the same time, I'll show  
 15 what must be understood by a miracle [§§13–15];

(ii) I'll show that we cannot know either the essence or the existence of God from miracles, and hence, that we cannot know his providence from miracles, but that all these things are far better perceived from the fixed and immutable order of nature [§§16–38];



(iii) by a number of Scriptural examples I'll show that Scripture itself understands by God's decrees and volitions—and hence his providence—  
 20 nothing but the order itself of nature, which follows necessarily from its eternal laws [§§39–51];

(iv) finally, I'll discuss how the miracles of Scripture are to be understood, and what must principally be noted regarding the miracle narratives [§§52–64].

These are the main points of the argument of this chapter. I think  
 25 they'll contribute in no small way to the purpose of the work as a whole.

[7] The first point [that nothing happens contrary to nature, but that it preserves an eternal, fixed and immutable order] is easily shown from what we demonstrated in Ch. 4<sup>1</sup> regarding the divine law: viz. that whatever God wills *or* determines involves eternal necessity and truth; [8] for we have shown, from the fact that God's intellect is not  
 30 distinguished from his will, that we affirm the same thing when we say that God wills something as when we say that he understands it. So by the same necessity with which it follows from the divine nature and perfection that God understands a thing as it is, it follows also that God wills the same thing as it is.<sup>2</sup> [9] But since nothing is necessarily true except by the divine decree alone, it follows quite clearly from  
 [III/83] this that the universal laws of nature are nothing but decrees of God, which follow from the necessity and perfection of the divine nature. Therefore, if anything were to happen in nature which was contrary to its universal laws, it would also necessarily be contrary to the divine  
 5 decree, intellect and nature. Or if someone were to maintain that God does something contrary to the laws of nature, he would be compelled to maintain at the same time also that God acts in a way contrary to his own nature. Nothing would be more absurd than that.

We could also show the same thing from the fact that the power of nature is the divine power and virtue itself. Moreover, the divine power is the very essence of God. But for the present I prefer to pass over this.<sup>3</sup>  
 10 [10] Nothing, therefore, happens in nature<sup>4\*</sup> which is contrary to its universal laws. Nor does anything happen which does not agree

1. See iv, 23–25.

2. That is, because God's intellect necessarily understands things as they are, and because his will and intellect are identical, his will necessarily wills them as they are.

3. Because the argument of the preceding paragraph relied on ascribing will and intellect to God, we might reasonably suspect it of being *ad hominem*. Cf. iv, 23, and the annotation there. But this paragraph seems to suggest an argument which relies only on doctrines Spinoza himself holds.

4. \*NB: By Nature here I do not understand only matter and its affections, but in addition to matter, infinite other things.

with those laws or does not follow from them. For whatever happens, happens by God's will and eternal decree, i.e., as we have now shown, whatever happens, happens according to laws and rules which involve eternal necessity and truth.

- 15 [11] So nature always observes laws and rules which involve eternal necessity and truth—though they are not all known to us—and so it also observes a fixed and immutable order. No sound reason urges us to attribute a limited power and virtue to nature, or to maintain that its laws are suited only for certain things and not everything. For since  
 20 nature's virtue and power is the very virtue and power of God, and its laws and rules are God's decrees themselves, we must believe without reservation that the power of nature is infinite, and that its laws are so broad that they extend to everything which is conceived by the divine intellect itself. [12] For otherwise what else are we saying but that God  
 25 has created a nature so impotent, and established laws and rules for it so sterile, that often he is compelled to come to its aid anew, if he wants it to be preserved and wants things to turn out as he wished? I think nothing is more foreign to reason than that.

[13] Thus, from these propositions—that nothing happens in nature  
 30 which does not follow from its laws, that its laws extend to all things conceived by the Divine intellect itself, and finally, that nature maintains a fixed and immutable order—it clearly follows that the term “miracle” cannot be understood except in relation to men's opinions,  
 [III/84] and means nothing but a work whose natural cause we cannot explain by the example of another familiar thing, or at least which cannot be so explained by the one who writes or relates the miracle.

- [14] I could, of course, say that a miracle is something whose cause cannot be explained according to the principles of natural things known  
 5 to the natural light. But since miracles have occurred according to the power of understanding of the common people, who were, in fact, completely ignorant of the principles of natural things, it is certain that the ancients took for a miracle what they could not explain in the way the common people are accustomed to explain natural things, viz. by falling back on memory to recall some other similar thing they are  
 10 accustomed to imagine without wonder. For the common people think they understand a thing well enough when they do not wonder at it.

- [15] So the ancients, and almost everyone up till now, has had no other standard for a miracle than this. We ought not doubt that many things are related as miracles in the Sacred Texts whose causes can eas-  
 15 ily be explained according to known principles of natural things. We already hinted at this in Ch. 2 when we spoke about the sun's standing

still in the time of Joshua, and its going backward in the time of Ahaz.<sup>5</sup> But we'll soon treat this more fully, when we discuss the interpretation of miracles, as I've promised to do in this chapter.

- 20 [16] It's time now to pass to the second point, viz. to show that from miracles we understand neither God's essence, nor his existence, nor his providence, but that on the contrary these things are far better perceived from the fixed and immutable order of nature. I proceed to demonstrate this as follows.<sup>6</sup>

- [17] Since God's existence is not known through itself,<sup>7\*\*</sup> it must  
25 necessarily be inferred from notions whose truth is so firm and steady that no power can be or be conceived by which they could be changed. At least, so they must appear to us when we infer God's existence from them, if we want to infer it beyond any chance of doubt. For if we  
30 could conceive that the notions themselves could be changed by some power, whatever in the end it was, we would doubt their truth, and consequently also doubt our conclusion, viz. God's existence, so that we could never be certain of anything.

- [18] Next, we know that nothing agrees with nature (or is contrary to it) except what we have shown to agree with those principles (or to be contrary to them). So if we could conceive that by some  
[III/85] power (whatever in the end it was) something could happen in nature which was contrary to nature, that would be contrary to those first notions, and we would have to reject it as absurd—either that, or we would have to doubt the first notions (as we have just shown) and consequently, doubt God and all things, however they might have been perceived.

- 5 [19] So it is far from true that miracles (understood as works contrary to the order of nature) show us the existence of God. On the contrary, they would make us doubt his existence, since without them we could

5. See Josh. 10:12–14, Isa. 38:7–8, and 2 Kings 20:8–11, discussed in ii, 26–28.

6. Gebhardt points out (V, 39) that this was one of the issues on which Spinoza and Juan de Prado agreed, as we can learn from Orobio de Castro's *Epistola invectiva contra Prado*. ALM cite Revah 1959, 102–4.

7. \*\*[ADN. VI] So long as the idea we have of God himself is not clear and distinct, but confused, we doubt God's existence, and consequently we doubt everything. For just as someone who does not properly know the nature of a triangle does not know that its three angles are equal to two right angles, so one who conceives the divine nature confusedly does not see that it pertains to the nature of God to exist. But for us to be able to conceive God's nature clearly and distinctly, we must attend to certain very simple notions, called common notions, and connect with them those pertaining to the divine nature. If we do that, it becomes evident to us: first, that God exists necessarily and is everywhere; next, that whatever we conceive involves in itself the nature of God and is conceived through it; and finally, that everything we conceive adequately is true. But on these matters see the preface of the book entitled *The principles of philosophy demonstrated in a geometric manner* [Volume I, pp. 231–38].

be absolutely certain of his existence, i.e., when we know that all things in nature follow a fixed and immutable order.

10 [20] But suppose a miracle is something which cannot be explained by natural causes. This can be understood in either of two ways: either it in fact has natural causes which nevertheless cannot be found by the human intellect, or it admits no cause except God, *or* God's will.

[21] But because all things which happen through natural causes also  
15 happen from God's power and will alone, in the end we must arrive at this: that whether a miracle has natural causes or not, it is a work which cannot be explained by its cause, i.e., a work which surpasses man's power of understanding.

But from a work, and absolutely, from anything which surpasses  
20 our power of understanding, we can understand nothing. For whatever we understand clearly and distinctly must become known to us either through itself or through something else which through itself is understood clearly and distinctly. [22] So from a miracle, *or* a work surpassing our power of understanding, we can understand neither God's essence, nor his existence, nor absolutely anything concerning  
25 God and nature. On the contrary, since we know that all things are determined and ordained by God, that nature's operations follow from God's essence, indeed, that the laws of nature are God's eternal decrees and volitions, we must conclude absolutely that the better we know natural things—the more clearly we understand how they depend on  
30 their first cause, and how they produce effects according to the eternal laws of nature—the better we know God and his will.

[23] That's why, in relation to our intellect, we have a far better right to call those works we clearly and distinctly understand works of God, and to refer them to God's will, than we do those we are completely ignorant of, though the latter occupy our imagination powerfully and  
[III/86] carry men away with wonder. For only the works of nature which we understand clearly and distinctly make our knowledge of God more elevated and indicate God's will and decrees as clearly as possible. So those who have recourse to the will of God when they have no knowledge of a thing are just trifling. It's a ridiculous way of confessing their ignorance.<sup>8</sup>

5 [24] Again, even if we could infer something from miracles, we could still not infer God's existence from them in any way. For since a miracle is a limited work, and never expresses any power except a definite and limited one, it is certain that from such an effect we cannot  
10 infer the existence of a cause whose power is infinite, but at most that

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8. Cf. E App., II/81/10–11.

of a cause whose power is greater [than that expressed by the effect]. I say *at most*, because from many causes concurring at the same time, there can also follow a work whose force and power is indeed less than the power of all the causes together, but far greater than the power of each cause. [25] But since (as we've already shown)<sup>9</sup> the laws of nature  
 15 extend to infinitely many things, and we conceive them under a certain species of eternity, and nature proceeds according to them in a definite and immutable order, to that extent they indicate to us God's infinity, eternity and immutability.

[26] We conclude, then, that we cannot know God, his existence,  
 20 or his providence, by miracles; but we can infer these things far better from the fixed and immutable order of nature. In this conclusion I speak of a miracle only as a work which surpasses, or is believed to surpass, men's power of understanding. For insofar as we suppose it to destroy, *or* interrupt, the order of nature, or to be contrary to nature's laws, to  
 25 that extent (as we have just shown) it could give no knowledge of God; on the contrary, it would take away the knowledge we naturally have, and make us doubt God and everything else.

[27] I don't recognize here any difference between a work contrary to nature and a work above nature (i.e., as some say, a work which in  
 30 fact is not contrary to nature, but which still cannot be produced or brought about by it).<sup>10</sup> For since a miracle doesn't happen outside nature, but in nature itself, even if it's said to be above nature, it's still necessary that it interrupt the order of nature, which we otherwise conceive as fixed and immutable, according to God's decrees. [28] Therefore, if something were to happen in nature which did not follow from its laws,  
 [III/87] that would necessarily be incompatible with the order which God has

9. Above iv, 23–25; vi, 7–12.

10. In CM II, 12 (I/276–77) Spinoza had noted that “most of the more prudent theologians concede that God does nothing against nature, but only acts above nature.” As he explained the distinction there, God's acting “above nature” involves his acting according to laws he has not communicated to the human intellect. It seems doubtful that the theologians to whom he refers would accept that explanation. In ST I, qu. 105, art. 6, Aquinas wrestles with the problem posed by Augustine's statements that “God, the Maker and Creator of each nature, does nothing against nature” (*Answer to Faustus, a Manichean*, vol. I/20, in Augustine 1990; PL 42, 480) and “God sometimes does things which are contrary to the usual course of nature” (*Answer to Faustus, a Manichean*, vol. I/20, in Augustine 1990; PL 42, 481). His solution seems to depend on making a distinction between “the order of things as it depends on the first cause” (which God cannot act against, since doing so would involve acting against his foreknowledge, or his will, or his goodness) and “the order of things according as it depends on any secondary cause.” Because God is not subject to the order of secondary causes, which depends on his will, he can do something outside that order. So, he can produce “the effects of secondary causes without [the secondary causes],” or produce “certain effects to which the secondary causes do not extend.”

established to eternity in nature through the laws of nature. And so that would be contrary to nature and its laws. Hence belief in it would make us doubt everything and would lead to Atheism.

[29] I think I've now shown, by strong enough reasons, what I wanted to regarding the Second point. From this we can conclude again that a miracle—whether [defined as] contrary to nature or above nature—is just an absurdity. So the only way we can understand a miracle in the Sacred Texts is as a work of nature which, as we have said, either surpasses men's power of understanding or is believed to surpass it.

[30] Before I proceed to my third point, I should like first to confirm, by the authority of Scripture, this opinion of ours—viz. that we cannot know God from miracles. Scripture nowhere teaches this openly. Still, it can easily be inferred from it, especially from what Moses commands (Deuteronomy 13[:1–5]), that [the people of Israel] should condemn to death a Prophet who leads them astray, even if he performs miracles.

[31] For he says that (even if) *וְאִם אֶתְּשָׁמֶעַ אֶל דְּבַר אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר אֵלַי וְהִנֵּי אֵת הַנְּבִיא הַהוּא יוֹמֵת וְגו' a sign and a wonder he has predicted to you should happen, etc., do not (nevertheless) assent to the words of this Prophet etc., because the Lord your God tests you etc. (Therefore) let that Prophet be condemned to death etc.* From this it clearly follows that even false Prophets can perform miracles, and that unless men are well protected by the true knowledge and love of God, miracles can lead them to embrace false Gods as easily as the True God. For Moses adds *וְגו' כי מִנְסָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֹתְכֶם וְגו' since the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love him with all your heart and all your soul.*

[32] Moreover, in spite of their many miracles, the Israelites were still not able to form any sound concept of God, as experience itself has testified. For when they believed Moses had left them, they sought visible divinities from Aaron. The idea of God they finally formed from so many miracles was a calf. How shameful! [Exodus 32:1–6].

[33] Although Asaph had heard of so many miracles, he still doubted God's providence and would almost have been turned from the true way if he had not at last understood true blessedness. See Psalm 73. Even Solomon, in whose time the affairs of the Jews were at the peak of their prosperity, supposes that all things happen by chance. See

[III/88] Ecclesiastes 3:19–21, 9:2–3, etc.<sup>11</sup>

11. The two passages explicitly cited are more notable for their mortalism (or at least, agnosticism about immortality) than for explicitly teaching that all things happen by chance. But see Eccles. 9:11–12. The criticism of Solomon here is somewhat surprising, after the praise of iv, 41–46, and v, 12. Though Ecclesiastes was traditionally ascribed to Solomon, this attribution is now generally rejected. See HCSB 890. When Spinoza discusses Ecclesiastes in x, 5, he does not discuss its authorship, only its canonicity.

[34] Finally, almost all the Prophets found it extremely obscure how the order of nature and what happened to men could agree with the concept they had formed concerning God's providence. But this was always quite clear to the Philosophers, who strive to understand things, not from miracles, but from clear concepts. They locate true happiness only in virtue and peace of mind; they are concerned, not that nature should obey them, but that they should obey nature; they know with certainty that God directs nature as its universal laws require, not as the particular laws of human nature require, and that God takes account, not of the human race only, but of the whole of nature.

[35] Scripture itself, then, establishes that miracles do not give a true knowledge of God or teach his providence clearly. Moreover, what is often found in Scripture—that God brought about wonders, to make himself known to men (as in Exodus 10:[1–]2 God deceived the Egyptians and gave signs of himself, that the Israelites would know that he was God)—does not entail that miracles really teach this, but only that the Jews had opinions which disposed them to be easily convinced by these miracles. [36] For we have shown clearly in the second chapter that the Prophetic arguments, *or* those which are formed from revelation, are not drawn from universal and common notions, but from things previously granted, no matter how absurd, and from the opinions of those to whom the things are revealed, *or* whom the Holy Spirit wishes to convince. We've illustrated this by many examples, and also by the testimony of Paul, who was a Greek with the Greeks and a Jew with the Jews [1 Corinthians 9:20–22].

[37] But although those miracles could convince the Egyptians and the Jews from things they granted, they still could not give a true idea and knowledge of God. They could only make them grant that there is a Divinity more powerful than anything else they knew, and that this Divinity cared, above all others, for the Hebrews (whose affairs at that time were turning out much more fortunately than they hoped). They could not make them grant that God cares equally for all. Only Philosophy can teach that. [38] So the Jews, like all who have known God's providence only from the different conditions of human affairs and men's unequal fortunes, persuaded themselves that they were dearer to God than the others, even though they still did not surpass the others in true human perfection, as we've already shown in Chapter 3.

[III/89] [39] I pass, then, to my Third point. I shall show from Scripture that God's decrees and commands, and consequently his providence, are really nothing but the order of nature. That is, when Scripture says that God did this or that, or that this or that happened by the will of God, what it really means is just that it happened according to the laws and order



of nature, and not, as the common people think, that for some period nature ceased to act, or that for some time its order was interrupted. [40] But Scripture doesn't teach directly things which don't concern its doctrine; as we've shown concerning the divine law, its purpose is not to teach things through their natural causes, or things which are  
 10 merely speculative. So what we want to prove here must be drawn by inference from certain Scriptural Narratives, where, by chance, events have been related more fully and with more circumstances.<sup>12</sup> I'll cite a number of examples.

[41] In 1 Samuel 9:15–16 it's related that God revealed to Samuel  
 15 that he would send Saul to him. Nevertheless, God didn't send Saul to him the way men usually send one man to another; this sending of God's was nothing but the order of nature itself. The same chapter relates [vv. 3–10] that Saul was looking for asses he had lost, and was already deliberating whether to return home without them when he went to the Prophet Samuel, on the advice of his servant, to learn from  
 20 him where he could find them. The whole narrative shows that Saul did not have any other command of God than this order of nature to cause him to go to Samuel.

[42] In Psalm 105:24[–25] it's said that God changed the hearts of the Egyptians so they would hate the Israelites. This was also a  
 25 completely natural change. It's evident from Exodus 1 that the Egyptians had no slight reason which moved them to reduce the Israelites to bondage.<sup>13</sup>

[43] In Genesis 9:13 God says to Noah that he'll put a rainbow in the clouds. This action of God is certainly nothing but the refraction and reflection of the rays of the sun, which the rays undergo in the drops  
 30 of water.<sup>14</sup> In Psalm 147:18 the natural action of the wind, and the heat by which frost and snow are melted, is called the word of God; and in v. 15 the wind and cold are called the command and word of God. In Psalm 104:4 wind and fire are called the messengers and ministers

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12. Maimonides' view in the *Guide* II, 48, is similar: whatever is produced in time must have a proximate cause, which is also produced in time—a natural cause, in Spinoza's terms—but the prophets sometimes omit these intermediate causes, and refer the events directly to God. Among the proximate causes omitted Maimonides includes free human choices. This will be a point of difference if Maimonides understands freedom as requiring an absence of causation. But on the face of it, that would be contrary to the causal principle he embraces. It appears that Maimonides was not consistent on this issue. Cf. Fox 1990, 87–88.

13. Exod. 1:7–11 suggests that the rapid growth in numbers, and consequent increasing power, of the Israelites prompted the Egyptians to reduce them to slavery.

14. Spinoza assumes the explanation of the rainbow offered by Descartes in his *Météores*, Discourse 8.

of God. Many other things of this kind are found in Scripture, which indicate quite clearly that the decree, order, dictate and word of God [III/90] are nothing but the very action and order of nature.

[44] So there is no doubt that everything related in Scripture happened naturally, and yet is referred to God, because, as we've already shown, the purpose of Scripture is not to teach things through their natural causes, but only to relate those things which fill the imagination, and to do this  
5 by that Method and style which serves best to increase wonder at things, and consequently to impress devotion in the hearts of the common people.

[45] So if we find in the Sacred Texts certain things whose causes we do not know how to give an account of, and which seem to have happened beyond, and indeed, contrary to the order of nature, they must not cause us any difficulty; we must believe without reservation  
10 that what really happened happened naturally. This is also confirmed by the fact that in miracles many circumstances were found, although they are not always related, particularly when they are celebrated in the Poetic style. I say that the circumstances of the miracles clearly show that they require natural causes.

[46] For example, to harass the Egyptians with boils, it was necessary for Moses to scatter ashes up into the air (see Exodus 9:10). Also the locusts attacked the country of the Egyptians by a natural command of God, i.e., by an east wind blowing a whole day and night, and they left it again by a very strong west wind (see Exodus 10:14, 19).<sup>15</sup> It was  
20 also by the same order of God that the sea opened a way for the Jews (see Exodus 14:21), viz. by Eurus,<sup>16</sup> which blew very strongly all night.

[47] Again, to revive the boy who was believed to be dead, Elisha had to lie upon him several times, until first he became warm and finally he opened his eyes (see 2 Kings 4:34–35).<sup>17</sup> So also the Gospel of John  
25 relates certain circumstances Christ used to heal the blind man.<sup>18</sup> Thus many other things are found in Scripture, all of which show sufficiently that miracles require something else besides what they call the absolute command of God.<sup>19</sup>

15. Exod. 10:13, 19 would be more exact.

16. That is, the east wind.

17. Spinoza's account of this story—emphasizing that Elisha lay upon the boy several times (*aliquoties*)—seems closer to the version given in the Septuagint than to that in the Masoretic text. But he omits the detail we might find most significant: that Elisha seems to have used what we would call mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

18. John 9:6–7 relates that Jesus spat on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and applied the mud to the man's eyes.

19. That is, to explain the event in terms of God's decrees (the laws of nature) it is necessary also to understand the particular circumstances under which the laws were operating.

[48] So we must believe that although the circumstances of miracles  
 30 and their natural causes are neither always nor all fully described, nevertheless the miracles did not happen without them. This is established also by Exodus 14:27, where it is related only that it was simply by the command of Moses that the sea rose up again, and there is no mention of a wind. Nevertheless, in the Song it is said (15:10) that it happened because God blew with his wind, i.e., with a very strong wind.<sup>20</sup> So this circumstance is omitted in the story, and for this reason  
 [III/91] the miracle seems greater.

[49] But perhaps someone will object that we find a great many things in Scripture which don't seem capable of being explained in any way by natural causes, e.g., that men's sins and prayers can be the cause of rain or of the fertility of the earth, or that faith was able to heal the  
 5 blind, and other things of this kind, related in the Bible.

But I think I have already replied to this. For I have shown<sup>21</sup> that Scripture does not teach things through their proximate causes, but only relates them in that order and with those phrases with which it can most effectively move people (especially, ordinary people) to devotion. For this reason it speaks quite improperly concerning God and  
 10 things, because its concern is not to convince people's reason, but to affect and fill their fantasy and imagination.

[50] If Scripture were to relate the destruction of some state in the way political historians usually do, that would not stir ordinary people at all. On the other hand, if it depicts everything poetically and refers everything to God, as it usually does, it will move them very much.  
 15 So when Scripture relates that the earth is barren because of men's sins, or that the blind were healed by faith,<sup>22</sup> those passages ought not to move us more than when it relates that because of men's sins God becomes angry, or sad, or repents of the good he has promised or done, or that because he sees a sign, he recalls a promise, or a great many  
 20 other things, which are either said poetically or are related according to the opinions and prejudices of the Writer.

[51] So we conclude here, without qualification, that everything Scripture truly relates as having happened must have happened, as all things do, according to the laws of nature. And if anything should be found which can be conclusively demonstrated to be contrary to the  
 25 laws of nature, or to have been unable to follow from them, we must

20. Spinoza refers here to the song ascribed to Moses in Exod. 15:1–18, which recapitulates in verse the prose account of the crossing of the Red Sea in Exod. 14.

21. Cf. i, 30–44.

22. ALM suggest Mark 10:51–52 and Luke 18:41–42 as examples of faith-healing. We might add Ps. 107:33–34 as an example of a land said to be barren because of men's sins.

believe without reservation that it has been added to the Sacred Texts by sacrilegious men.<sup>23</sup> For whatever is contrary to nature is contrary to reason; and what is contrary to reason is absurd, and therefore to be rejected.

[52] It remains now only to note a few things concerning the interpretation of miracles, or rather to recapitulate them (for the main points have already been made), and to illustrate them with one or two examples, as I have promised to do here in this Fourth part of the chapter. I want to do this to prevent anyone from rashly supposing, because he has misinterpreted some miracle, that he has found anything in Scripture contrary to the light of nature.

[53] It is quite rare for men to relate a thing simply, just as it happened, without mixing any of their own Judgment into the narration. [III/92] Indeed, when they see or hear something new, unless they take great precautions against their preconceived opinions, they will, for the most part, be so prejudiced by them that they will perceive something completely different from what they see or hear has happened, particularly if the thing which has been done surpasses the grasp of the narrator or the audience, and especially if it makes a difference to his affairs that the thing should happen in a certain way.

[54] That's why in their Chronicles and histories men relate their own opinions more than the actions they're reporting, and why two men who have different opinions relate one and the same event so differently that they seem to be speaking about two events, and finally, why it is often not very difficult to find out the opinions of the Chronicler and historian just from their histories. If I did not think it would be superfluous, I could cite many examples to confirm this, both from Philosophers who have written the history of nature, and from Chroniclers. But I'll cite only one example from Sacred Scripture. Let the Reader himself judge of the others.

[55] In the time of Joshua the Hebrews (as we noted above)<sup>24</sup> believed, with the common people, that the sun moves, as they say, with a daily motion and that the earth is at rest. They adapted the miracle which happened to them when they fought against the five kings to this preconceived opinion. For they did not relate simply that that day was longer than usual, but that the sun and the moon stood still, *or* ceased their motion [Joshua 10:12–13]. This was also quite advantageous to them at that time in overcoming the Gentiles, who worshipped the sun,

23. On the possible corruption of the text by pious frauds, see also vii, 3 and 25. See also Letter 76, IV/324a/5–10.

24. See ii, 26–27.

and in proving to them by experience that the sun is under the control of another divinity, according to whose command it is bound to change its natural order. [56] So partly because of religion and partly because  
 25 of preconceived opinions they conceived and recounted the affair far differently than it really could have happened.

Therefore, to interpret the miracles in Scripture and to understand from the narrations of them how they really happened, we need to know the opinions of those who first narrated them, and those who left them to us in writing, and to distinguish those opinions from what the  
 30 senses could have represented to them. Otherwise we'll confuse their opinions and judgments with the miracle itself, as it really happened.

It's important to know their opinions not only for these purposes, but also so that we do not confuse the things which really happened with imaginary things, which were only Prophetic representations. [57] For many things are related in Scripture as real, and were even  
 [III/93] believed to be real, which were, nevertheless, only representations and imaginary things, e.g., that God (the supreme being) descended from heaven (see Exodus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 5:19),<sup>25</sup> and that Mt. Sinai was smoking because God had descended upon it, surrounded with  
 5 fire, and that Elijah ascended to heaven in a fiery chariot with horses of fire [2 Kings 2:11]. Of course all these things were only representations, adapted to the opinions of those who handed them down to us as represented to them, i.e., as actual things. [58] For anyone who is even a little wiser than the common people are knows that God has  
 10 neither a right hand nor a left hand, that he neither moves nor is at rest, that he is not in a place, but is absolutely infinite, and that all the perfections are contained in him.<sup>26</sup> They know these things, I say, if they judge things from the perceptions of the pure intellect, and not as the imagination is affected by the external senses, as the common people usually do. That is why they imagine God as corporeal and as  
 15 maintaining a kingly rule, whose throne they feign to be in the dome of heaven, above the stars, whose distance from the earth they do not

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25. The first edition has Deut. 5:28, which seems to be clearly a mistake for 5:19 (in the numbering of the Hebrew Bible) or 5:22 (in the numbering of English versions).

26. Although Spinoza would endorse the conception of God which he here contrasts with that of the common people, his rejection of the anthropomorphism of Scripture (and of popular conceptions of God) is common among philosophical theologians. Cf., for example, Maimonides' comments on the biblical passages which seem to imply that God has a place, and may move from one place to another, in the *Guide* I, 8–10. See also his comments on the Talmudic saying, "The Torah speaks in the language of the sons of man," in *Guide* I, 26. That God is absolutely infinite—i.e., has infinitely many attributes, each of which is infinite in its own kind—is a position Spinoza shares with Descartes. Cf. Descartes' discussion of the idea of God in the Third Meditation.

believe to be very great. It is to these and similar opinions (as we have said) that a great many events in Scripture are adapted, which therefore ought not to be accepted by Philosophers as real.

[59] Finally, to understand miracles as they really happened, it is  
 20 important to know the Hebrews' expressions and figures of speech.<sup>27</sup> For whoever does not attend sufficiently to them will ascribe to Scripture many miracles which its writers never intended to relate, so that he will know nothing at all, not only about the things and miracles as they really happened, but also about the mind of the authors of the sacred texts.

25 [60] For example, Zechariah, speaking in 14:7 of a future battle, says וְהָיָה יוֹם אֶחָד הוּא יוֹדֵעַ לַיהוָה לֹא יוֹם וְלֹא לַיְלָה וְהָיָה לַעֲרָב יִהְיֶה אוֹר *and there shall be one day, known only to God, (for there will be) neither day nor night, but in the evening there will be light.* With these words he seems  
 30 to predict a great miracle, but all he means is that for a whole day the battle will be in doubt, and its outcome known only to God, and that they will win victory in the evening. For the Prophets were accustomed to use expressions of that kind to write about and predict the victories and defeats of nations.

[61] In the same way we see Isaiah, who in 13:[10] depicts the destruction of Babylon thus: כִּי כּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וּכְסִילֵיהֶם לֹא יִהְיוּ אוֹרִים חֹשֶׁךְ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּי כּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וּכְסִילֵיהֶם לֹא יִהְיוּ אוֹרִים *since the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light, the sun will grow dark in its rising, and the moon will not give forth the brightness of its light.* I don't think anyone believes that this happened in the destruction of that state, or that those other things happened which he soon adds, viz. עַל כֵּן שָׁמַיִם אֲרִגִּז וְתִרְעַשׁ הָאָרֶץ *therefore I shall make the heavens tremble and the earth will be moved from its place.*<sup>28</sup>  
 5 מִמְקוֹמָהּ *therefore I shall make the heavens tremble and the earth will be moved from its place.*<sup>28</sup>

[62] So also in 48:21, to signify to the Jews that they would return safely from Babylon to Jerusalem, and that they would not suffer from thirst on the journey, Isaiah says וְלֹא צָמְאוּ בַּחֲרָבוֹת הַיָּבֵשׁ מִיָּם מִצּוֹר הִזִּיל לָהֶם *and they did not thirst, he led them through the deserts, he made water flow from the rock for them, he split open the rock and the*  
 10 *waters flowed.* By these words he means only that the Jews, as happens, will find springs in the deserts, from which they will quench their thirst. For when, with Cyrus' agreement, they made their way to Jerusalem, it is apparent that no such miracles happened to them.

15 [63] In this way a great many things happen in the Sacred Texts which were only a manner of speaking among the Jews. There is no

27. Cf. Maimonides *Guide* II, 47.

28. Isa. 13:13. Maimonides uses these examples to make the same point in *Guide* II, 29 (Gebhardt V, 41).

need to recount them all separately here. But I do want to make this general point: in using these habitual expressions the Hebrews were speaking not only eloquently, but also, and mainly, in a spirit of devotion. That is why *to bless God* is found in the Sacred Texts in place of  
 20 *to curse God* (see 1 Kings 21:10 and Job 2:9). That's also the reason why they referred all things to God, and why Scripture seems to relate nothing but miracles, even when it speaks of the most natural things.<sup>29</sup> We've already given several examples of this above. So we must believe that when Scripture says that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh  
 25 [e.g., in Exodus 4:21, 7:3], that means nothing but that Pharaoh was obstinate. And when it is said that God opens the windows of heaven [Genesis 7:11], that means only that it rained very hard, and similarly with other things.

[64] If you attend thoroughly to these things, and to the fact that Scripture relates many things very briefly, without any circumstances, and in a way almost mutilated, you will find almost nothing in Scripture  
 30 which can be demonstrated to be contrary to the light of nature; on the other hand, with moderate reflection you will be able to understand, and interpret easily, many things which seemed most obscure. With this I think I've shown clearly enough what I intended to.

[65] Before I end this chapter, there's something else I want to note. I've proceeded regarding miracles according to a method completely  
 [III/95] different from the one I followed regarding Prophecy. Concerning Prophecy I affirmed nothing but what I could infer from foundations revealed in the Sacred Texts. But here I've elicited the main points only from principles known to the natural light. I did this deliberately. For since Prophecy surpasses man's power of understanding, and is a purely  
 5 Theological question, I could affirm nothing about it, nor even know in what it chiefly consisted, except from the foundations which have been revealed. I was compelled to put together a history of Prophecy, and to formulate certain doctrines from it, which would teach me the nature and properties of Prophecy, as far as this can be done.

10 [66] But concerning miracles what we are asking is completely philosophical: can we grant that something happens in nature contrary to its laws, or something which couldn't follow from them? So I didn't need anything like that. Indeed, I thought it wiser to unravel this question according to foundations known to the natural light, as those which  
 15 are most known. I say that I thought it wiser, for I could easily have resolved it solely from the doctrines and foundations of Scripture. To make this evident to everyone, I shall show it here briefly.

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29. Cf. Maimonides *Guide* II, 48 (Gebhardt V, 42).



[67] In certain passages<sup>30</sup> Scripture affirms of nature in general that it observes a fixed and immutable order. For example, see Psalm 148:6  
 20 and Jeremiah 31:35–36. Moreover, the Philosopher<sup>31</sup> teaches most clearly in Ecclesiastes 1:10 that nothing new happens in nature. And illustrating this same point in vv. 11–12,<sup>32</sup> he says that although sometimes something happens which seems new, nevertheless it is not new, but happened in ages past of which there is no memory. For as he says,  
 25 there is no remembrance of things past among us today, nor will there be any remembrance of today's events among those who come after us. [68] Again, he says in 3:11 that God has ordered all things well in their time, and in 3:14 he says that he knows that whatever God makes will remain to eternity, and that nothing can be added to it or subtracted from it. All these passages teach very clearly that nature observes a  
 30 fixed and immutable order, that God has been the same in all ages, both those known to us and those unknown, that the laws of nature are so perfect and fruitful that nothing can be added to them or taken away from them, and finally, that miracles are seen as something new only because of men's ignorance.

[69] Scripture, then, teaches these things explicitly, but nowhere does it teach that anything happens in nature which is contrary to its laws,  
 [III/96] or which cannot follow from them. So these things ought not to be ascribed to Scripture. To this we may add that miracles require causes and circumstances—as we have already shown [§§39–51]—and that they do not follow from I know not what kingly rule which the common  
 5 people ascribe to God, but from his command and divine decree, i.e.,—as we have also shown from Scripture itself [§§52–64?]<sup>33</sup>—from the laws of nature and its order, and finally, that miracles can also be performed by those who seduce the people, as is proven by Deuteronomy 13[:1–5] and Matthew 24:24.

[70] From these conclusions it follows with utmost clarity that miracles were natural events, and hence, that they are to be explained in  
 10 such a way that they do not seem to be something new (to use Solomon's term) or to be contrary to nature. If possible, they should be explained in such a way that they seem to be very much in agreement

30. As Joël noted (1870), Maimonides discusses the passages cited in this paragraph in his *Guide* II, 28. Maimonides reminds us that some wished to suppress the book of Ecclesiastes as heretical.

31. A reference to Solomon. Cf. ii, 48n. The author of Ecclesiastes is identified in the first verse as Qoheleth, “the son of David, king in Jerusalem.” Qoheleth has usually been taken to mean “the Preacher,” or “the Teacher,” or more generally, “one who speaks to an assembly.” Spinoza's identification of him as a philosopher is presumably based on his assumption that the author was Solomon and on Solomon's reputation for wisdom.

32. It seems that Spinoza's reference would more logically be to vv. 9–11.

with natural things. That everyone may be able to do this more easily, I have passed on certain rules derived solely from Scripture.<sup>33</sup> [71] But though I say Scripture teaches these things, I don't mean by that that  
 15 it teaches them as lessons necessary for salvation, only that the Prophets embraced the same things we do. So everyone is free to judge of these things as he thinks best for himself, for the purpose of entering wholeheartedly into the worship of God and religion.

[72] Josephus agrees, for he writes as follows at the end of Book II of his *Antiquities*:

Let no one resist the word miracle, if a safe passage was made through  
 20 the sea for these ancient men, free of wickedness, whether this was done by the will of God or of its own accord; once the Pamphylian sea was also divided for those who were with Alexander, king of Macedon, and when there was no other way, it offered a passage to them, it being God's will to destroy the Persian empire through him. Everyone who  
 25 writes about Alexander's deeds admits this. So anyone may judge these things as he pleases.<sup>34</sup>

These are the words of Josephus, and his judgment concerning belief in miracles.

[III/97]

## CHAPTER VII

*On the Interpretation of Scripture*

[1] Everyone says that Sacred Scripture is the word of God, which teaches men true blessedness or the way to salvation. But their deeds  
 5 reveal a completely different view. For the common people seem to care

33. I think that by the "rules derived from Scripture" Spinoza is referring to the points about Hebrew ways of speaking made in §§59–64.

34. Josephus, *Antiquities* II, xvi, 5, discussing the parting of the Red Sea. Shirley (2002) points out that Spinoza quotes Josephus from a fifteenth-century Latin translation by Rufinus Aquileiensis which was in his library, and which uses a phrase which makes no sense. Rather than go back to Josephus' Greek, I've followed ALM in omitting the unintelligible phrase, which seems inessential to Spinoza's point. Thackeray (LCL edition of Josephus) observes that the concluding sentence is a standard formula Josephus uses whenever he recounts a miracle. See his comment on i, 108, where the issue is the longevity of the biblical patriarchs. He reports that by the second century C.E. "this non-committal attitude to the marvellous had become a rule for historians," citing a passage from Lucian which reads (in the Fowler translation): "It may occasionally happen that some extraordinary story has to be introduced; it should be simply narrated, without guarantee of its truth, thrown down for anyone to make what he can of it; the writer takes no risks and shows no preference" (Lucian 1905, II, §60).

nothing about living according to the teachings of Sacred Scripture. We see that almost everyone peddles his own inventions as the word of God,<sup>1</sup> concerned only to compel others to think as he does, under the pretext of religion. [2] We see that the Theologians have mainly  
 10 been anxious to twist their own inventions and fancies out of the Sacred Texts, to fortify them with divine authority. There's nothing they do with less scruple, or greater recklessness, than interpret Scripture *or* the mind of the Holy Spirit. If they're worried about anything, it's not that they fear they may ascribe some error to the holy Spirit and stray  
 15 from the path to salvation, but that others may convict them of error, trampling on their authority and exposing them to scorn.

[3] But if men were sincere in what they say about Scripture, they would live very differently. These disagreements wouldn't upset them so often; they wouldn't quarrel with such hatred; and they wouldn't be  
 20 in the grip of such a blind and reckless desire to interpret Scripture and think up new doctrines in Religion. On the contrary, they wouldn't dare to embrace anything as the teaching of Scripture which it doesn't teach with the greatest possible clarity. And finally, those sacrilegious people who have not been afraid to corrupt Scripture in so many passages would have taken great care to avoid such a crime, and would  
 25 have kept their sacrilegious hands away from those texts.<sup>2</sup>

[4] But in the end ambition and wickedness have been so powerful that religion is identified not so much with obeying the Holy Spirit as with defending human inventions, so that religion consists not in loving-kindness, but in spreading dissension among men, and in propagating the most bitter hatred, which they shield under the false name  
 30 of religious zeal and passionate devotion. To these evils we may add superstition, which teaches men to scorn reason and nature, and to  
 [III/98] admire and venerate only what is contrary to both of these.

[5] So it's no wonder that to admire and venerate Scripture more, men have been eager to explain it in a way that makes it seem as contrary as possible to both reason and nature. They dream that the most profound mysteries lie hidden in the Sacred Texts, wear themselves  
 5 out searching for these absurdities, neglecting the rest, which are useful. Whatever they invent in their madness they attribute to the Holy Spirit, and strive to defend with the utmost force and violent affects. That's how men are made: what they conceive by the pure intellect,

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1. A recurrence of the theme first mentioned in the Preface, §20, which will return in xiv, 1.

2. A recurrence of the theme first mentioned in vi, 51. Gebhardt argues that Spinoza's reference to sacrilegious men is aimed at the Pharisees, appealing to a report by Salomon van Til (V, 43–44). ALM are skeptical.

they defend only with the intellect and reason; but what they think  
 10 because of affects of the heart, they defend with those affects.

[6] To extricate ourselves from these confusions, to free our minds  
 from theological prejudices, and to stop recklessly embracing men's  
 inventions as divine teachings, we must treat the true method of inter-  
 preting Scripture and discussing it. For as long as we are ignorant of  
 15 this, we cannot know anything with certainty about what either Scripture  
 or the Holy Spirit wishes to teach.

To sum up briefly, I say that the method of interpreting Scripture  
 does not differ at all from the method of interpreting nature, but agrees  
 with it completely. [7] For the method of interpreting nature consists  
 20 above all in putting together a history of nature, from which, as from  
 certain data, we infer the definitions of natural things. In the same way,  
 to interpret Scripture it is necessary to prepare a straightforward his-  
 tory of Scripture and to infer from it the mind of Scripture's authors,  
 by legitimate inferences, as from certain data and principles. [8] For  
 25 in this way everyone—provided he has admitted no other principles or  
 data for interpreting Scripture and discussing it than those drawn from  
 Scripture itself and its history—everyone will always proceed without  
 danger of error. He will be able to discuss the things which surpass  
 our grasp as safely as those we know by the natural light.

30 [9] But to establish clearly that this way is not only certain, but  
 also the only way, and that it agrees with the method of interpreting  
 nature, we must note that Scripture most often treats things which  
 cannot be deduced from principles known to the natural light. For  
 historical narratives and revelations make up the greatest part of it.

[10] But the historical narratives give a prominent place to miracles,  
 [III/99] i.e., (as we showed in the last Chapter) narratives of unusual events in  
 nature, accommodated to the opinions and judgments of the historians  
 who wrote them. Moreover, the revelations were also accommodated  
 to the opinions of the Prophets (as we showed in the second Chapter);  
 5 they really surpass man's power of understanding. So the knowledge of  
 all these things, i.e., of almost everything in Scripture, must be sought  
 only from Scripture itself, just as the knowledge of nature must be  
 sought from nature itself.

[11] As for the moral teachings also contained in the Bible, although  
 they can be demonstrated from common notions, still, it cannot be  
 10 demonstrated from these notions that Scripture teaches them. This can  
 only be established from Scripture itself. Indeed, if we want to testify,  
 without prejudice, to the divinity of Scripture, we must establish from  
 Scripture alone that it teaches true moral doctrines. For only from this  
 can its divinity be demonstrated. We have shown that the Prophets'

15 certainty is known chiefly from the fact that they had a heart inclined toward the right and the good.<sup>3</sup> So it's necessary to establish the same thing for us also, if we're to be able to have faith in them.<sup>4</sup>

[12] Moreover, we've also demonstrated already that the divinity of God cannot be proven by miracles (not to mention that miracles could  
20 also be performed by false Prophets). So the divinity of Scripture must be established only by the fact that it teaches true virtue. But this can only be established by Scripture. If it could not be done, it would only be as a result of great prejudice that we would embrace it and testify to its divinity. Therefore, all knowledge of Scripture must be sought only from Scripture itself.<sup>5</sup>

25 [13] Finally, Scripture does not give definitions of the things of which it speaks, any more than nature does. So just as the definitions of natural things are to be inferred from the different actions of nature, in the same way [the definitions of the things spoken of in Scripture] are to be drawn from the different narratives occurring in the Texts concerning them.

30 [14] Therefore, the universal rule in interpreting Scripture is to attribute nothing to Scripture as its teaching which we have not understood as clearly as possible from its history. What sort of history must that be? What must it chiefly relate? These are the questions we must now answer.<sup>6</sup>

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3. Spinoza refers here to ii, 4–10, where he had argued that, in addition to a sign, the moral rectitude of the prophet was a necessary condition for his certainty regarding the truth of the prophetic message.

4. I take this to mean that if we are to have confidence in the truth of the moral teachings we find in Scripture, we must first establish that our hearts are inclined toward the right and the good. If we assume that knowing that our hearts are so inclined requires at least a basic knowledge of the right and the good, this seems to entail that Scripture cannot be our sole, or even most fundamental, source of moral knowledge.

5. That our knowledge of Scripture must be sought only from Scripture itself is a fundamental Reformation principle, advocated by both Luther and Calvin, for whom it was essential in maintaining the status of Scripture as the final authority in matters of Christian doctrine. Cf. Althaus 1966, ch. 9, and John Thomson, ch. 4 in McKim 2004. See also the Westminster Confession, I, ix: "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly." Note that this rule of interpretation assumes the fundamental consistency of Scripture, a principle Spinoza rejected as an *a priori* assumption in the Preface, §19.

6. Spinoza's requirements for a history of Scripture are set out in three sections of unequal length. First, it must contain an account of the nature and properties of the language of Scripture (§15); next, it must contain a subject index (§§16–22); and finally, it must contain an account of the authorship, intended audience, reception, transmission, and canonization of the work (§23). This history of Scripture only provides us with the tools we need to apply the method for interpreting Scripture which Spinoza will expound in §§27–37. It is not evident that we can compile a history of Scripture, in the sense

[15] First, it must contain the nature and properties of the language in which the books of Scripture were written, and which their Authors [III/100] were accustomed to speak. For in this way we shall be able to find out all the meanings each utterance can admit in ordinary conversational usage. And because all the writers, both of the Old Testament and the New, were Hebrews, it's certain that the History of the Hebrew language is necessary above all others, not only for understanding the books of the Old Testament, which were written in this language, but also for understanding those of the New. For though they've been circulated in other languages, nevertheless they are expressed in a Hebrew manner.<sup>7</sup>

[16] Second, it must collect the sentences of each book and organize them under main headings so that we can readily find all those concerning the same subject. Next, it must note all those which are ambiguous or obscure or which seem inconsistent with one another. When I call these sentences clear or obscure here, I mean that it is easy or difficult to derive their meaning from the context of the utterance, not that it is easy or difficult to perceive their truth by reason. For we are concerned only with the meaning of the utterances, not with their truth. [17] Indeed, we must take great care, so long as we are looking for the meaning of Scripture, not to be predisposed by our own reasoning, insofar as it is founded on the principles of natural knowledge (not to mention now our prejudices). In order not to confuse the true meaning with the truth of things, we must seek that meaning solely from linguistic usage, or from reasoning which recognizes no other foundation than Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

To make this clearer, I'll illustrate with an example. [18] These sentences of Moses—that *God is a fire* and that *God is jealous*<sup>9</sup>—are as clear as possible, so long as we attend only to the meaning of the words. So I count them among the clear sentences, even though they

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Spinoza has in mind, consistently with the principle that our knowledge of Scripture must be derived only from Scripture itself.

7. Note that Spinoza does not *say* that the New Testament was *written* in a language other than Hebrew, only that it *circulated* in such a language. Apparently he does not say it was written in Greek because he does not believe that. See ADN. XXVI, attached to xi, 3. The adnotations were not published until after Spinoza's death. In some cases—notably, ADN. XXI—they contain material Spinoza seems to have regarded as highly sensitive, and perhaps dangerous to publish during his lifetime.

8. Here Spinoza applies the principle, announced in the Preface, §19, that we must not assume, in advance of determining the meaning of Scripture, that it is true and divine. We must first determine what Scripture means, and then make whatever inferences seem appropriate about its truth and divinity.

9. Both claims are made in Deut. 4:24. See also Exod. 20:5, 34:14; Deut. 5:9; and—to take a New Testament text which Spinoza believes was originally written in Hebrew (vii, 64)—Heb. 12:29.

are very obscure in relation to truth and reason. Indeed, although their literal meaning is contrary to the natural light, we must still retain that literal meaning, unless it is also clearly opposed to the principles and foundations derived from the history of Scripture. And conversely, if we find that these sentences, in their literal interpretation, are contrary to principles derived from Scripture, they would still have to be interpreted differently (i.e., metaphorically), even though they agreed completely with reason.

[19] So to know whether Moses believed that God is a fire, we must in no way infer our answer from the fact that this sentence [taken literally] agrees with reason or is contrary to it. Instead, we must rely only on other statements Moses himself made. Since Moses teaches clearly, in a great many places, that God has no likeness to any visible things in the heavens, on the earth, or in the sea,<sup>10</sup> we must give a metaphorical explanation, either of this sentence or of all of the others. [20] But we ought to depart from the literal meaning as little as possible. So we must first ask whether this one sentence, *God is a fire*, admits another meaning beyond the literal one, i.e., whether the term *fire* means something other than natural fire. If linguistic usage does not show that that term can signify something else, then we must not interpret this sentence in any other way, no matter how contrary it may be to reason. Instead, we would have to accommodate the others [which say or entail that God is not a fire] to this one, however much the other statements agree with reason.

[21] But if linguistic usage does not offer us an alternative meaning, then these sentences would be irreconcilable, and we would have to suspend judgment about them. However, because the term *fire* is also taken for anger and jealousy (see Job 31:12), these sentences of Moses are easily reconciled, and we legitimately infer that these two sentences, *God is a fire* and *God is jealous*, are one and the same [i.e., make one and the same statement].

[22] Next, since Moses clearly teaches that God is jealous, and nowhere teaches that God lacks passions *or* passive states of mind, from this we must conclude without reservation that Moses believed this, or at least that he wished to teach it, however much we may believe that this opinion is contrary to reason.<sup>11</sup> For as we've already shown, it's not

10. Cf. ii, 36 and 43. When Maimonides defends the claim that God has no likeness to any existing thing (*Guide* I, 55), his scriptural evidence comes from Isaiah (40:18, 25) and Jeremiah (10:6), not any books Moses is supposed to have written. He might have cited Exod. 8:10, 9:14, 15:11, or Deut. 33:26, 29.

11. ALM note two passages in the *Metaphysical Thoughts* where Spinoza explains why it might be thought contrary to reason to ascribe passions to God: in CM ii, 4, he



permissible for us to twist the meaning of Scripture according to the dictates of our reason and according to our preconceived opinions. Our whole knowledge of the Bible must be sought from the Bible alone.

[23] Finally, this history must describe fully, with respect to all the books of the Prophets, the circumstances of which a record has been preserved, viz. the life, character, and concerns of the author of each book, who he was, on what occasion he wrote, at what time, for whom and finally, in what language. Next, it must relate the fate of each book: how it was first received, into whose hands it fell, how many different readings of it there were, by whose deliberation it was accepted among the sacred books, and finally, how all the books which everyone now acknowledges to be sacred came to be unified into one corpus.

The history of Scripture, I say, must contain all these things. [24] For [III/102] to know which sentences are put forward as laws and which as moral teachings, it's important to know the life, character, and concerns of the author. Moreover, the better we know someone's spirit and mentality, the more easily we can explain his words. Next, if we're not to confuse eternal teachings with those which could be useful only for a time or only for a few people, it's important also to know on what occasion, at what time, and for which nation or age all these teachings were written.

[25] Finally, it's important to know the other things I've also mentioned, in order to know, in addition to the authority of each book, whether it could have been corrupted by falsifying hands, and whether errors have crept in, and whether they have been corrected by men sufficiently expert and worthy of trust.<sup>12</sup> We absolutely need to know all these things, so that we may embrace only what is certain and indubitable, and not be carried away by a blind impulse to accept whatever has been thrust upon us.

[26] Once we have this history of Scripture, and have firmly resolved to maintain nothing as certainly the teaching of the Prophets unless it follows from this history, or is derived from it as clearly as possible, then it will be time for us to prepare to investigate the intentions of the

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argues that God cannot be changed by an external cause; and in CM ii, 8, he argues that we speak improperly if we say that God hates some things and loves others. In the *Ethics* Spinoza will argue, not only that God is without passions, but more generally, that he does not have any affects of joy or sadness, even active ones (V P17). Spinoza will return to this example in xv, 15.

12. Gebhardt (V, 45–46) calls attention to a passage from the epilogue of Ludwig Meyer's *Philosophy the Interpreter of Holy Scripture* which makes it clear that he and Spinoza were both concerned with this issue. See Meyer 1666, 231. Totaro (vii, n. 40) cites an interesting passage from Richard Simon's *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, in which he concedes that there have been many changes made in the texts by later authors, but claims that this fact does not impugn the authority of Scripture, because the authors of these changes were inspired by God (Simon 1678, Préface, a2).

Prophets and the Holy Spirit. To do this we also need a method and  
 20 order like the one we use for interpreting nature according to its history.

[27] In examining natural things we strive to investigate first the  
 things most universal and common to the whole of nature: motion  
 and rest, and their laws and rules, which nature always observes and  
 through which it continuously acts. From these we proceed gradually  
 25 to other, less universal things.<sup>13</sup> In the same way, the first thing we must  
 seek from the history of Scripture is what is most universal, what is  
 the basis and foundation of the whole of Scripture, and finally, what all  
 the Prophets commend in it as an eternal teaching, most useful for all  
 30 mortals. For example, that a unique and omnipotent God exists, who  
 alone is to be worshipped, who cares for all, and who loves above all  
 those who worship him and who love their neighbor as themselves, etc.<sup>14</sup>

[28] Scripture, I say, teaches these and similar things everywhere, so  
 clearly and so explicitly that there has never been anyone who disputed  
 the meaning of Scripture concerning these things. But what God is,  
 [III/103] and in what way he sees all things, and provides for them— these and  
 similar things Scripture does not teach explicitly and as an eternal doc-  
 trine. On the contrary, we have already shown above that the Prophets  
 themselves did not agree about them. So concerning such things we  
 must maintain nothing as the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, even if it  
 5 can be determined very well by the natural light.

[29] Once we rightly know this universal teaching of Scripture, we  
 must next proceed to other, less universal things, which nevertheless  
 concern how we ordinarily conduct our lives and which flow from  
 this universal teaching like streams. Examples would include all the  
 particular external actions of true virtue, which can only be put into  
 10 practice when the occasion for them arises. Whatever is found to be  
 obscure *or* ambiguous in the Texts about these things must be explained  
 and determined according to the universal teaching of Scripture. But  
 if we find any things which are contrary to one another, we must see  
 on what occasion, and at what time, and for whom they were written.

[30] For example, when Christ says *blessed are those who mourn, for*  
 15 *they shall receive comfort* [Matthew 5:4], we do not know from this Text  
 what kind of mourner he means. But because he teaches later that we  
 should be apprehensive about nothing except the kingdom of God

13. Cf. Spinoza's geometric exposition of Cartesian physics, in Part II of his *Descartes'*  
*"Principles of Philosophy"* (in Volume I of this edition, pp. 262ff.).

14. Here, and later, in xii, 34–36, Spinoza will give the impression that the prophets  
 consistently taught monotheism. Prima facie this is inconsistent with his attribution of  
 monolatry to Moses in ii, 37. But this passage does neatly express his preference for the  
 teachings of the later prophets.

and his justice, which he commends as the supreme good (see Matthew 6:33), from this it follows that by mourners he understands only those who mourn for the kingdom of God and the justice men have neglected. For this is the only thing they can mourn, who love nothing but the divine kingdom *or* righteousness, and who completely disdain what fortune may bring.

[31] So also, when he says *to a man who strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also*, and what follows [Matthew 5:39ff.]. If Christ had ordered this to judges, as a Lawgiver, he would have destroyed the law of Moses with this precept. Nevertheless, he advises us expressly that this is not his intention. See Matthew 5:17. So we must consider who said these things, to whom they were said, and when.

[32] It was Christ who spoke. And he did not institute laws as a lawgiver; instead as a teacher he taught lessons, because (as we have shown above)<sup>15</sup> he did not want to correct external actions so much as the heart. Secondly, he said these things to oppressed men, who were living in a corrupt republic, where justice was completely neglected. Finally, he said it at a time when he saw that the ruin of the republic was near at hand.<sup>16</sup> But we have seen that the very same thing Christ teaches here, when the ruin of the City is at hand, Jeremiah<sup>17</sup> also taught at the first destruction of the City, i.e., at a similar time (see Lamentations 3:25–30). [33] So the Prophets taught this only in a time of oppression, and nowhere put it forward as a law. By contrast, Moses, who wasn't writing at a time of oppression, but (note this) was working for the institution of a good republic, commanded that an eye be paid for an eye<sup>18</sup>—although he also condemned vengeance and hatred of one's neighbor.

From this it follows very clearly, just from the fundamental principles of Scripture, that this teaching of Christ and Jeremiah that we should submit to injuries, and yield to the impious in everything, is appropriate only in those places where justice is neglected and in times of oppression, but not in a good republic. Indeed, in a good republic, where justice is preserved, everyone is bound, if he wants to be thought just, to exact a penalty for injuries in the presence of a judge (see Leviticus 5:1)—not for the sake of vengeance (see Leviticus 19:17–18), but with the intention of defending justice and the laws of one's native land, and

15. See iv, 30–34; v, 8–9.

16. Perhaps a reference to Luke 19:41–44.

17. A tradition which goes back as far as the Septuagint identifies Jeremiah as the author of Lamentations, but modern critical scholarship is “practically unanimous” in rejecting this view. See ABD IV, 138.

18. Cf. Exod. 21:23–25, Lev. 24:19–20, Deut. 19:21.

so that the evil should not profit by being evil.<sup>19</sup> [34] All these things also agree completely with natural reason.

I could cite many other examples in this manner, but I think these  
 15 will suffice to explain what I intend, and how useful this method is. That's all I care about for the present. But so far we have taught only the method of investigating those statements of Scripture which concern the way we should conduct our lives, and which therefore can be investigated more easily. For really there was never any dispute among the Writers of the Bible on these matters.

20 [35] The other things which occur in the Texts, which are matters of pure speculation, cannot be investigated so easily. For the path to these is narrower. As we've already shown,<sup>20</sup> the Prophets disagreed among themselves in speculative matters, and their narrations of things were very much accommodated to the prejudices of each age. So it is not at  
 25 all permissible for us to infer or explain the intention of one Prophet from the clearer passages of another, unless it is established with the utmost clarity that they both favored one and the same opinion.

[36] Therefore I shall now explain briefly how in such matters the intention of the Prophets is to be unearthed from the history of Scripture. Concerning these matters too, we must begin with the things  
 30 which are most universal, inquiring first from the clearest statements of Scripture, to find out what Prophecy *or* revelation is, and in what it chiefly consists. Next we must ask what a miracle is, and so on, with the things which are most common. From there we must descend to the opinions of each Prophet. And from these things finally we must proceed to the meaning of each revelation *or* Prophecy, of each story,  
 [III/105] and of each miracle.

[37] We must use great caution here not to confuse the intention of the Prophets and Historians with that of the Holy Spirit or with the truth of the matter. We've shown this already in the appropriate places, with many examples. So I don't consider it necessary to discuss these things at greater length. Still, there's one point we must make  
 5 about the meaning of revelations: this method teaches us only how to seek out what the Prophets really saw or heard, not what they wanted to signify or represent by those symbols. For we can conjecture this, but not deduce it with certainty from the foundations of Scripture.

[38] We've shown, then, the way to interpret Scripture, and at the  
 10 same time demonstrated that this is the only way to find its true meaning

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19. ALM note a reminiscence here of a line from Terence's *Phormio*, which might be translated: "It's our fault if it profits the evil to be evil because we are too eager to be called good and kind" (766).

20. See ii, 24–52.

with great certainty. Of course, if anyone has a certain tradition about this, *or* a true explanation received from the Prophets themselves (as the Pharisees claim), I concede that he is more certain of the meaning of Scripture. Similarly, if anyone has a High Priest who cannot err  
 15 concerning the interpretation of Scripture (as the Roman Catholics boast). [39] Nevertheless, since we cannot be certain, either of this tradition or of the authority of the High Priest, we also cannot found anything certain on these things. For the most ancient Sects of the Christians denied [the authority of the Pope], and the most ancient Sects of the Jews denied [the Pharisaic tradition]. Moreover—not to  
 20 mention other objections now—if we pay attention to the chronology the Pharisees received from their Rabbis, by which they extend this tradition all the way back to Moses, we shall find that it is false, as I show elsewhere.<sup>21</sup>

[40] So a tradition like that must be very suspect to us. It's true that in our Method we are compelled to suppose that one tradition of the  
 25 Jews is uncorrupted: the meaning of the words of the Hebrew language, which we have accepted from them. But though we don't doubt that tradition at all, we still doubt the tradition [about the meaning of passages in Scripture]. For it could never be to anyone's advantage to change the meaning of a word; but it could often be to someone's advantage  
 30 to change the meaning of an utterance. [41] It's extremely difficult to change the meaning of a word. Anyone who tried to do this would be forced, as part of the process, to explain all the authors who wrote in that language and used that word in its accepted meaning. Either he would have to do this according to the temperament and mind of each author, or else he would have to distort them very carefully.

[42] Moreover, both the common people and the learned preserve language; but only the learned preserve books and the meanings of utterances. So we can easily conceive that the learned could have  
 [III/106] changed or corrupted the meaning of an utterance in some very rare book which they had in their 'power,'<sup>22</sup> but not that they could have changed the meaning of words. Moreover, if someone wants to change the meaning of some word to which he has become accustomed, it will be difficult for him to observe the new meaning afterward both in  
 5 speaking and in writing. [43] These and other reasons easily persuade us that it could not occur to anyone to corrupt a language, but that it

21. See the discussion of chronological issues which begins in ix, 8.

22. Reminiscent of Hobbes, *Leviathan* xxxiii, 20, which raises a concern about the possibility of falsification of the text of the New Testament by the ecclesiastics who had control of the texts, but dismisses it (ironically, I think), on the ground that if they had been inclined to falsify the texts, they would have made them more favorable to their power.

could often occur to someone to corrupt the intention of a Writer by changing his utterances or by misinterpreting them.

This method of ours, founded on the principle that the knowledge  
 10 of Scripture is to be sought only from Scripture, is the only true  
 method [of interpreting Scripture]. So whatever it cannot furnish for  
 acquiring a complete knowledge of Scripture, we must absolutely give  
 up as hopeless. [44] But now we must say what difficulty this method  
 involves, or what is to be desired in it, for it to be able to lead us to a  
 complete and certain knowledge of the Sacred Texts.

15 To begin with, a great difficulty in this method arises from the fact  
 that it requires a complete knowledge of the Hebrew language. But where  
 is this now to be sought? [45] Those who spoke and wrote Hebrew in  
 ancient times left nothing to posterity regarding its foundations and  
 teaching. Or at least we have absolutely nothing from them: no Dic-  
 20 tionary, no Grammar, no Rhetoric. Moreover, the Hebrew nation has  
 lost all its marks of distinction and honor—this is no wonder, after it  
 has suffered so many disasters and persecutions—and has retained only  
 some few fragments of its language and of a few books. For almost all  
 the names of fruits, birds, fish, and many other things have perished in  
 25 the injustice of the ages. Again, the meaning of many nouns and verbs  
 which occur in the Bible is either completely unknown or is disputed.

[46] We lack, not only all these things, but also and especially, a  
 phraseology of this language. For time, the devourer, has obliterated  
 from the memory of men almost all the idioms and manners of speak-  
 ing peculiar to the Hebrew nation. Therefore, we will not always be  
 30 able, as we desire, to find out, with respect to each utterance, all the  
 meanings it can admit according to linguistic usage. Many utterances  
 will occur whose meaning will be very obscure, indeed, completely  
 incomprehensible, even though they are expressed in well-known terms.

[47] In addition to the fact that we cannot have a complete history  
 of the Hebrew language, there is the very nature and constitution of  
 [III/107] this language. So many ambiguities arise from this that it is impossible  
 to devise a method<sup>23\*\*</sup> which will teach you how to find out with cer-  
 tainty the true meaning of all the utterances of Scripture. For besides  
 the causes of ambiguity common to all languages there are certain  
 others in this language from which a great many ambiguities are born.  
 5 I consider it worth the trouble to note these here.

[48] First, ambiguity and obscurity of utterances often arises in the  
 Bible because the letters of the same organ are confused. The Hebrews

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23. \*\*[ADN. VII] That is, for those of us who are not accustomed to this language  
 and who are not familiar with its ways of speaking.

divide all the letters of the Alphabet into five classes according to the five parts of the mouth used in pronunciation: the lips, the tongue, the  
 10 teeth, the palate, and the throat. E.g., *aleph*, א, *bet*, ב, *ayin*, ע, and *he*, ה, are called gutturals and are used for one another without any distinction, or at least without any known to us. So לֵא, *el*, which means *to*, is often taken for עַל, *hgal*, which means *over*, and vice versa. As a result, all the parts of an utterance are often made either ambiguous or sounds  
 15 which have no meaning.

[49] A second cause of the ambiguity of utterances is the multiple meanings which conjunctions and adverbs have. For example, ו, *vau*, is used indiscriminately for conjoining and disjoining and means *and*, *but*, *because*, *also*, *then*. כִּי, *ki*, has seven or eight meanings: *because*, *although*,  
 20 *if*, *when*, *as*, *that*, *burning*, etc. Almost all the particles are like this.

[50] A third cause, which is the source of many ambiguities, is that the verbs in the Indicative lack the Present, Imperfect, Pluperfect, Future perfect, and other tenses commonly used in other languages. Moreover,  
 25 in the Imperative and the Infinitive, they lack all except the Present; and in the Subjunctive, they lack all tenses without exception. And although all these defects of Tenses and Moods could easily—indeed, with the greatest elegance—have been made up by certain rules deduced from the foundations of the language, nevertheless, the most ancient writers completely neglected them, and indiscriminately used the Future tense  
 30 for the Present and the Past, and on the other hand, the Past for the Future, and the Indicative for the Imperative and Subjunctive. This causes great ambiguity in the utterances.

[51] In addition to these three causes of ambiguity in the Hebrew language, there are still two others to be noted, each of which is of far greater importance. First, the Hebrews do not have letters for vowels.  
 [III/108] Second, they were not accustomed to use any signs [of punctuation] to separate their utterances, or to make their meaning more explicit *or* emphasize them. [52] And although the lack of these two, viz. vowels and signs of punctuation, is usually made up by points and accents, nevertheless we cannot trust these, since they have been devised and  
 5 established by men of a later age, whose authority ought to be worth nothing to us. The ancients wrote without points (i.e., without vowels and accents), as is established by many testimonies. Those who came later added these two things, as it seemed to them proper to interpret the Bible. So the accents and points which we have now are only modern  
 10 interpretations, and do not deserve any more trust or authority than any other explanations of the authors.

[53] Those who don't know this and also don't know how they ought to excuse the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who (in 11:21)



interprets the text of Genesis 47:31 very differently than it is taken  
 15 in the pointed Hebrew text, as if the Apostle ought to have learned  
 the meaning of Scripture from those who added the points. To me,  
 of course, it seems rather that those who added the points are to be  
 blamed. So that everyone may see this, and at the same time see that  
 this discrepancy has arisen only from the lack of vowels, I shall set out  
 each of the two interpretations.

[54] Those who added the points, by their points, interpreted the  
 20 text to read *and Israel bent over*, or (changing *ayin*, ע, to *aleph*, א, a letter  
 of the same organ) *toward the head of the bed*. But the Author of the  
 letter interpreted the text to read *and Israel bent over the head of his staff*,  
 reading מטה, *mate* [staff], where others read מטה, *mita* [bed], a difference  
 which arises only from the vowels. Now since, in that narrative, it is a  
 question only of Jacob's old age, but not, as in the following chapter,  
 25 of his illness, it seems really more probable that the meaning of the  
 historian was that Jacob bent over the head of his staff (which elderly  
 men need to hold themselves up), not over the head of the bed, especially  
 since in this way it is not necessary to suppose any change of letters.

[55] By this example I didn't want just to reconcile that passage  
 30 of the Letter to the Hebrews with the text of Genesis, but mainly to  
 show how little trust we should put in the modern points and accents.  
 Anyone who wants to interpret Scripture without prejudice is bound  
 to doubt these matters, and to reexamine them.

[III/109] [56] Let's return now to our subject. From the constitution and  
 nature of the Hebrew language anyone can easily conclude that so many  
 ambiguities must occur that there can be no method for resolving all  
 of them. We've shown that the only way of unearthing the true mean-  
 5 ing from the many which linguistic usage makes possible is the mutual  
 comparison of utterances. But there's no reason we should hope to be  
 able to do this in every case. There are two reasons for this. First, it's  
 only by chance that the comparison of utterances can throw light on  
 an utterance. No Prophet wrote with the intention of explaining the  
 words of another Prophet; they didn't even write to explain their own  
 10 words! Second, we cannot infer the mind of one Prophet, Apostle,  
 etc., from that of another except in matters concerning the conduct  
 of life—not when they speak concerning speculative matters *or* when  
 they relate miracles and historical narratives. We've already shown this  
 quite plainly.<sup>24</sup>

[57] I could show, by various examples, that there are many inexpli-  
 15 cable utterances in Holy Scripture. But for the present I prefer to pass

24. See ii, 13–52.

over them, and to proceed to the other things which need to be noted: namely, what difficulty this true method of interpreting Scripture still contains, or what is lacking in it.

[58] There is yet another difficulty in this method: it requires a history of the circumstances of all the books of Scripture. For the most part we do not know this history. Either we are completely ignorant of the authors (or, if you prefer, Writers)<sup>25</sup> of many of the books, or else we have doubts about them. I shall show this fully in what follows. Moreover, for the books whose Writers we do not know, we also do not know on what occasion or at what time the books were written. In addition, we do not know into whose hands all the books fell, nor in which copies so many different readings were found, nor, finally, whether there were not many other readings in other copies.

[59] Why it matters to know all these things, I've indicated briefly in the proper place. But there I deliberately omitted certain things we now need to consider. If we read a book which contains incredible or incomprehensible things, or is written in very obscure terms, and we don't know its author, or when or on what occasion it was written, it will be pointless for us to try to become more certain of its true meaning. [60] If we're ignorant of all these things, we can't know *anything* about what the author intended, or could have intended. On the other hand, when we know these things properly, we determine our thoughts in such a way that we're not predisposed by any prejudice. So we don't attribute to the author—or to the one on whose behalf the author wrote—more or less than is just. And we don't think about any things other than those the author could have had in mind, or which the time and occasion required.

I think everyone knows this. [61] It often happens that we read similar stories in different books and make very different judgments about them, according to the different opinions we have of their writers. I know I once read in a book that a man named Orlando the furious<sup>26</sup> used to ride a winged monster in the air, that he flew over whatever regions he wanted to, and that by himself he slaughtered an immense number of men and giants. The book contained other fantasies of this

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25. Bennett suggests, plausibly, that the intention may be to accommodate the traditional view that the ultimate author of Scripture was God, and that the human "writers" were no more than scribes. Cf. Maimonides' eighth fundamental principle of the Jewish religion: "We are to believe that the whole Torah was given us through Moses our Teacher entirely from God. . . . We do not know exactly how it reached us, but only that it came to us through Moses, who acted like a secretary taking dictation." Maimonides *Reader*, 420. See also below, vii, 60.

26. See Ariosto, *Orlando furioso* Canto X, 66ff. But as the commentators note, the story is that of Ruggiero, not Orlando.

kind, which are completely incomprehensible from the standpoint of the intellect. [62] I'd also read a similar story in Ovid, about Perseus,<sup>27</sup> and  
 15 finally, another, in the books of Judges and Kings, about Samson, who, alone and unarmed, slaughtered thousands of men, and about Elijah, who flew through the air, and at last went up into heaven in a chariot of fire, with horses of fire.<sup>28</sup> These stories, I say, are completely similar. Nevertheless, we make a very different judgment about each of them:  
 20 that the first wanted to write only trifles, the second, political matters, and the third, finally, sacred matters.<sup>29</sup> And we persuade ourselves of this only because of the opinions we have of these writers.

[63] So it's clear that for writings which are obscure or incomprehensible to the intellect, we must have some knowledge of the authors  
 25 if we want to interpret their writings. And for the same reasons, when we have different versions of obscure stories, if we are to select the true reading, we need to know in whose copies the different readings are found, and whether still other readings have ever been found in the writings of other men of greater authority.

30 [64] There's one final difficulty in interpreting certain books of Scripture according to this method: we don't possess them in the same language in which they were first written. For according to the common opinion, the Gospel of Matthew, and no doubt also the Letter to the Hebrews, were written in Hebrew.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, these [original texts] are not extant. Moreover, regarding the book of Job there is doubt  
 [III/111] about what language it was written in. In his commentaries Ibn Ezra affirms that it has been translated from another language into Hebrew, and that this is the reason for its obscurity.<sup>31</sup> I say nothing about the apocryphal books, since they are of greatly different authority.

27. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* IV, 614ff.

28. The stories about Samson are in Judg. 15:15 and 16:30. The one about Elijah is in 2 Kings 2:11.

29. Appuhn took the first author referred to here to be Ariosto, and accordingly expressed surprise that Ovid should be taken to be a political writer. Droetto/Giancotti suggest that we should count Ovid (rather than Ariosto) as the first writer Spinoza is referring to, the author of Judges as the second, and the author of Kings as the third.

30. The opinions discussed here—that Matthew originally wrote his gospel in Hebrew and that the Letter to the Hebrews was also written originally in Hebrew—go back at least to Eusebius. See his *Church History* III, xxiv, 6; III, xxxix, 16; and VI, xiv, 2–3. But it seems that they no longer represent the consensus of biblical scholars. See Brown 1997, 208–12, 683–704. Eusebius and his sources are probably using the term “Hebrew” to refer to what we would now call Aramaic, the language most commonly spoken by Palestinian Jews in the first century. On this see Meyer 1896.

31. The Hebrew of the Book of Job is exceptionally difficult, with more unique or rare words than any other biblical book, words whose meaning we are often obliged to conjecture on the basis of what we know about other related languages. It also has

[65] These are all the difficulties I had undertaken to recount arising  
 5 from this method of interpreting Scripture according to the history  
 available to us. I consider them so great that I don't hesitate to say  
 this: in a great many places either we don't know what Scripture really  
 means or we're just guessing about its meaning without any certainty.

[66] On the other hand, we should note again that all these dif-  
 10 ficulties can prevent us from grasping the intention of the Prophets  
 only concerning things we can't perceive and can only imagine—not  
 concerning things we can grasp with the intellect and easily form a clear  
 concept of.<sup>32\*\*</sup> For things which by their nature are easily perceived  
 can't be said so obscurely that they aren't easily understood. As the  
 proverb says: to one who understands a word is enough.<sup>33</sup>

[67] Euclid wrote only about things quite simple and most intelli-  
 15 gible. Anyone can easily explain his work in any language. To grasp his  
 intention and be certain of his true meaning we don't need a complete  
 knowledge of the language he wrote in, but only a quite ordinary—  
 almost childish!—knowledge. Nor do we need to know about his life,  
 20 concerns and customs, or in what language, to whom and when he  
 wrote, or the fate of his book, or its various readings, or how and by  
 whose deliberation it was accepted.

[68] What I've said here about Euclid must be said about everyone  
 who has written about things by their nature perceptible. So we con-  
 clude that the history available to us is enough to enable us to easily  
 25 grasp the intention of Scripture concerning moral teachings. In that  
 area we can be certain of its true meaning. For the teachings of true  
 piety are expressed in the most familiar words, since they are very  
 ordinary and no less simple and easy to understand. And because true  
 30 salvation and blessedness consists in true peace of mind, and we truly  
 find peace only in those things we understand very clearly, [69] from  
 this it follows with utmost clarity that we can grasp with certainty the  
 intention of Scripture concerning things salutary and necessary for

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many syntactic peculiarities. But apparently few modern scholars would explain these  
 difficulties the way Ibn Ezra did. See Anchor Job, xlvii–l.

32. \*\*[ADN. VIII] By things one can perceive I understand not only those legitimately  
 demonstrated, but also those we're accustomed to embrace with moral certainty and  
 hear without wonder, even if they can't be demonstrated in any way. Everyone grasps  
 Euclid's propositions before they're demonstrated. Thus I also call perceptible and clear  
 those stories of things, both future and past, which don't surpass human belief, as well  
 as laws, institutions and customs (even if they can't be demonstrated mathematically).  
 Those obscure symbols and stories which seem to surpass all belief, I call impossible to  
 perceive. Still, many of these can be investigated according to our method, so that we  
 can perceive the author's thought.

33. The proverb "A word to the wise is sufficient" occurs both in Terence (*Phormio*  
 III, 541) and Plautus (*Persa* V, 729) (ALM).

blessedness. There's no reason why we should be apprehensive about the rest. Since for the most part we cannot embrace these other things by  
 [III/112] reason and the intellect, this would show more curiosity than concern for our advantage.

With this I think I have shown the true method of interpreting Scripture and explained my opinion about it adequately. [70] No doubt everyone now sees that this method requires no light beyond the natural  
 5 light itself. For the nature and excellence of this light consists above all in this: that by legitimate principles of inference it deduces and infers things obscure from things known, or given as known. Our method requires nothing else. We grant that it doesn't suffice for tracking  
 10 down, with certainty, everything in the Bible. Still, that doesn't arise from any defect in the method, but from this: the way it teaches to be true and right has never been practiced or commonly used by men. So with the passage of time this way has become very difficult, and almost impenetrable. I think the difficulties I've raised establish this very clearly.

[71] Now it's time to examine the opinions of those who disagree  
 15 with us. First, we must examine the opinion of those who maintain that the natural light does not have the power to interpret Scripture, but that a supernatural light is most necessary for this.<sup>34</sup> What this light is beyond the natural light, I leave it to them to explain. [72] For my part, I can only conjecture that they too wished to confess, though in  
 20 rather obscure terms, that for the most part they are in doubt about the true meaning of Scripture. For if we look at their explanations, we find that they contain nothing beyond the natural, indeed, nothing but mere conjectures. Compare them, if you will, with the explanations of those who confess candidly that they have no light beyond the natural.  
 25 You'll find them to be completely similar: human, long pondered, and laboriously devised.

[73] As for their contention that the natural light does not suffice for the interpretation of Scripture, two things show that this is false: first, as we've already demonstrated, the difficulties of interpreting Scripture have not arisen from a defect in the powers of the natural light, but only from the negligence (not to say wickedness) of the men who were  
 30 indifferent to the history of Scripture while they could still construct it; and second, this supernatural light is a divine gift granted only to

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34. Here Spinoza surely has in mind the Calvinist view that our knowledge of God through Scripture depends on the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* I, vi, 1–3; I, vii, 1, 2, 4, 5; and Parker 1995b, 21–27. Calvin, however, is more concerned with issues about the authority of Scripture, the establishment of the canon, and the uncorrupted transmission of its text than he is with the interpretation of particular passages.

the faithful. (Unless I'm mistaken, everyone acknowledges this second point.)<sup>35</sup> [74] But the Prophets and the Apostles were accustomed to preach, not only to the faithful, but for the most part to the impious and those lacking in faith. So those people were capable of understanding [III/113] the Prophets' and Apostles' meaning. Otherwise, it would have seemed that the Prophets and Apostles were preaching to small children and infants, not to men endowed with reason. Moreover, Moses would have prescribed laws in vain, if they could be understood only by the faithful, who require no law. So those who demand a supernatural light 5 to understand the Prophets' and Apostles' meaning obviously seem to be lacking in the natural light themselves. Far be it from me, then, to judge that such people possess a supernatural divine gift.

[75] Maimonides' opinion was quite different. He thought that each passage of Scripture admits various (indeed, contrary) meanings, and that we aren't certain of the true meaning of any passage unless 10 we know that, as we interpret it, it contains nothing which does not agree with reason, or which is contrary to it. If it's found that its literal meaning is contrary to reason—no matter how clear the literal meaning seemed to be—he thinks it should still be interpreted differently. [76] He indicates this as clearly as possible in *The Guide of the Perplexed* (II, 25), for he says:

15 דע כי אין בריחתנו מן המאמר בקדמות העולם מפני הכתובים אשר באו בתורה בהיות  
העולם מחודש כי אין הכתובים המורים על חדוש העולם יותר מן הכתובים המורים על היות  
השם גשם ולא שערי הפירוש סתומים בפנינו ולא נמנעים לנו בעניין חדוש העולם אבל  
היה אפשר לנו לפרשם כמו שעשינו בהרחקת הגשמות ואולי זה היה יותר קל הרבה והיינו  
20 יכולים יותר לפרש הפסוקים ההם ולהעמיד קדמות העולם כמו שפרשנו הפסוקים והרחקנו  
היותו יתברך גשם וגו'

Know that it isn't the scriptural texts concerning the creation of the world which deter us from saying that the world has existed from eternity. For the texts which teach that the world is created are no more numer-  
ous than those which teach that God is corporeal; we are not without 25 opportunities for explaining them. We're not even hindered, but could have explained the texts concerning the creation of the world as we did when we denied that God is corporeal. Perhaps this would have been much easier to do; perhaps we could have explained them and laid a foundation for the eternity of the world more conveniently than when  
30 we explained the Scriptures to get rid of the doctrine that the blessed God is corporeal. But two reasons move me not to do this, and not to believe this (i.e., that the world is eternal):

35. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* III, i, 1; xxiv, 1; IV, xiv, 8.

[III/114] 1) because it is established by a clear demonstration that God is not corporeal, and it is necessary to explain all those passages whose literal meaning is contrary to the demonstration; for it is certain that they must then have an explanation (other than the literal explanation); but the eternity of the world is not shown by any demonstration; so it is not necessary to do violence to the Scriptures and to smooth them out<sup>36</sup> for the sake of a merely probable opinion, to whose contrary we could incline, if some reason should persuade us; and

5 2) because to believe that God is incorporeal is not contrary to the fundamentals of the Law, etc.; but to believe in the eternity of the world, in the way in which Aristotle did, destroys the foundation of the law, etc.

[77] These are Maimonides' words. From them it clearly follows [that he thought we must interpret Scripture so as to make it consistent with reason]. For if he thought it was established by reason that the world is eternal, he would not hesitate to twist Scripture and to  
10 smooth it out so that in the end it would seem to teach this very thing. Indeed, he would immediately be certain that, however much Scripture everywhere expressly protested against it, nevertheless it meant to teach this eternity of the world. This means he can't be certain of the true meaning of Scripture, however clear it may be, so long as he can doubt whether the proposition it seems to assert is true, or so long as he thinks the truth of that proposition has not been established. For  
15 so long as the truth of the matter is not established, we don't know whether the thing agrees with reason or is contrary to it. So [on this theory] we wouldn't know whether the literal meaning is the correct interpretation or not.

[78] If [Maimonides'] opinion were true, I would concede, absolutely, that we need some other light beyond the natural to interpret Scripture.  
20 For (as we've already shown)<sup>37</sup> hardly any of the things found in these Texts can be deduced from principles known by the natural light. So the power of the natural light can't establish anything for us about their truth, and hence, can't establish anything for us about Scripture's true meaning and intention. For this we would need another light.

[79] Again, if this opinion were true, it would follow that the common  
25 people, who for the most part have no knowledge of demonstrations, and don't have time for them, wouldn't be able to accept anything about Scripture except on the authority and testimonies of those who

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36. Perhaps Spinoza's translation of Maimonides is tendentious here. The Pines translation at this point reads: "Consequently, in this case the texts ought not to be rejected and figuratively interpreted."

37. Above, vii, 9–10.



philosophize. They'd have to suppose that the Philosophers can't err concerning the interpretation of Scripture. This would obviously intro-  
 30 duce a new authority into the Church, and a new kind of priest, or a High Priest, which the people would mock rather than venerate.

[80] It's true that our method requires knowledge of the Hebrew language, and that the common people don't have time for studying that either. Still, we're not vulnerable to an analogous objection. For the ordinary Jews and gentiles to whom the Prophets and Apostles preached long ago, and for whom they wrote, understood the language  
 [III/115] the Prophets and Apostles used. This knowledge of the language enabled them to grasp the Prophets' meaning. But it didn't enable them to grasp the reasons for the things they preached. On Maimonides' view, to be able to grasp the Prophets' meaning they would also have had to know those reasons.

[81] From the nature of our method, then, it doesn't follow that  
 5 the common people must trust in the testimony of interpreters. For I point out ordinary people who knew the language of the Prophets and Apostles; but Maimonides does not point to any ordinary people who understand the causes of things, from which they might grasp the Prophets' and Apostles' meaning.

[82] As for today's common people, we've already shown [§§68–69] that everything necessary for salvation can easily be grasped in any  
 10 language, even though the reasons for them aren't known, because they are so ordinary and familiar. This grasp is what the common people trust, not the testimony of interpreters. As for the things [not necessary for salvation], in those matters they share the same fate as the learned.

[83] But let's return to Maimonides and examine his opinion more  
 15 carefully. First, he presupposes that the Prophets agreed among themselves in everything, and that they were Philosophers and Theologians of the highest caliber. For he maintains that they drew their conclusions from the truth of the matter. But we have shown in Chapter 2 that this is false.

[84] Next, he supposes that the meaning of Scripture can't be established from Scripture itself. For the truth of things isn't established  
 20 from Scripture itself (since it demonstrates nothing and doesn't teach the subjects it treats through definitions and first causes). So in Maimonides' opinion, the true meaning of Scripture can't be established from Scripture, and so, shouldn't be sought from Scripture. But we've established in this chapter that this too is false. For we've shown, both  
 25 by reason and by examples, that the meaning of Scripture is established only from Scripture itself, and must be sought from Scripture itself alone, even when it speaks of things known by the natural light.

[85] Finally, he presupposes that we're permitted to explain and twist the words of Scripture according to our preconceived opinions, to deny their literal meaning (even when that meaning is most clearly perceived  
 30 *or* most explicit), and to change it into any other meaning we like. Quite apart from the fact that this license is diametrically opposed to the things we've demonstrated in this Chapter (and in others), everyone sees that it's excessive and rash.

[86] But suppose we grant him this great freedom. What good will that do? None, of course. For we won't be able to investigate in this way things which can't be demonstrated. These make up the greatest  
 [III/116] part of Scripture. And we won't be able to explain or interpret them according to this standard. By contrast, following our method we can explain most of these passages, and discuss them with confidence. We've already shown this, both by reason and by example. As for the  
 5 things perceivable by their nature, we can easily elicit their meaning just from the context of the utterances. We've already shown this too. So Maimonides' method is utterly useless.

[87] Furthermore, his method completely takes away all the certainty the common people can have about the meaning of Scripture from a natural reading of it, and which everyone can have by following another  
 10 method. So we condemn Maimonides' opinion as not only useless, but harmful and absurd.

[88] As for the Pharisees' tradition, we've already said above [§§38–39] that it's not consistent. Moreover, we've said [*ibid.*] that the Roman Pontiffs' authority needs a clearer testimony. I reject it for this reason alone. For if the Roman Pontiffs could establish it  
 15 for us from Scripture as certainly as the Jewish High Priests previously did, I would not be at all upset by the fact that there were heretics and impious men among them. After all, there were also heretics and impious men among the High Priests of the Hebrews, men who achieved the Priesthood by perverse means, but who still had, according to the command of Scripture, the supreme 'power of  
 20 interpreting the law. See Deuteronomy 17:11–12, 33:10, Malachi 2:8.

[89] But since [the Popes] show us no such testimony, their authority remains highly suspect.

In case anyone should be deceived by the example of the High Priest of the Hebrews into thinking that the Universal religion also requires a Pontiff, it should be noted that because the laws of Moses  
 25 were the public legislation of their Country, they required, if they were to be preserved, a certain public authority. For if each person had the freedom to interpret the public legislation according to his own will, no republic could survive. It would immediately be dissolved by this

very fact, and the public legislation would be private legislation. [90] But the nature of Religion is very different. For since it consists not so  
 30 much in external actions as in simplicity and honesty of heart, it is not the domain of any public legislation or public authority. For simplicity and honesty of heart are not instilled in men by the command of laws or by public authority, and absolutely no one can be compelled by force or by laws to become blessed. For this what is required is pious and brotherly advice, good education, and above all, one's own free judgment.

[III/117] [91] Therefore, since each person has the supreme right to think freely, even about Religion, and it's inconceivable that anyone can abandon his claim to this right, each person will also have the supreme right and the supreme authority to judge freely concerning Religion, and  
 5 hence to explain it and interpret it for himself. [92] For the supreme authority to interpret the laws, and the supreme judgment concerning public affairs, are lodged with the magistrates only because those are matters of public right. So for the same reason the supreme authority to explain religion, and to judge about it, will be in each person's hands, because it is a matter of each person's right.

10 [93] It is, therefore, far from true that we can infer the authority of the Roman Pontiff to interpret religion from the authority of the Hebrew Priests to interpret the laws of their Country. On the contrary, we can more easily infer from [the authority of the Priests] that each of us has that authority to the greatest extent possible.

[94] And we can also show from this that our method of inter-  
 15 preting Scripture is the best. For since each person has the utmost authority to interpret Scripture, the standard of interpretation must be nothing but the natural light common to all, not any supernatural light or external authority. [The standard of interpretation] must also  
 20 be not so difficult that only the most acute Philosophers can apply it; it must be accommodated to the natural and common human mentality and capacity. We have shown that our method satisfies this condition. For we have shown that the difficulties [our method] now has have arisen from men's negligence, and not from the nature of the method.

[III/117]

CHAPTER VIII

25           *In which it is shown that the Pentateuch,  
and the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel,  
and Kings are not autographs.*

THEN WE ASK: WERE THERE SEVERAL WRITERS  
OF ALL OF THESE BOOKS, OR ONLY ONE? AND WHO WAS HE?

[1] In the preceding Chapter we treated the foundations and principles  
of our knowledge of the Scriptures, and showed that they are just a  
30 genuine history of the Scriptures. Though such a history is very neces-  
sary, the Ancients still neglected it. Or if they wrote any of it (or handed  
it down [in an oral tradition]), that has perished by the assault of time.  
So a large part of the foundations and principles of this knowledge has  
[III/118] fallen into oblivion.

[2] This loss is one we might still have endured, if those who sub-  
sequently transmitted the texts had stayed within the proper limits,  
and in good faith transmitted to their successors the few things they  
had received or found, without concocting new things out of their  
own brains. The result has been that the history of Scripture has been  
5 left, not only incomplete, but also quite faulty. The foundations of the  
knowledge of the Scriptures are not just too slight to have allowed a  
whole [history of Scripture] to be built on them; they are defective.

[3] My aim is to correct these faults and to remove the common  
prejudices of Theology. But I fear my attempt may come too late.  
10 Things have already nearly reached the point where men do not allow  
themselves to be corrected about this, but stubbornly defend what they  
have embraced under the guise of religion. Nor does any place seem to  
be left for reason, except among a very few (few if compared with the  
rest), so widely have these prejudices taken possession of men's minds.  
15 Nevertheless, I shall try. I shall not give up putting the matter to the  
test, for there is no reason to despair completely.

[4] To show these things in an orderly way, I'll begin with the prejudices  
concerning the true Writers of the Sacred Books. First, concerning the writer  
of the Pentateuch. Almost everyone has believed him to be Moses.<sup>1</sup> Indeed,

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1. The view that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch seems to be based on a  
misunderstanding of Deut. 31:9 (see Anchor Genesis, xix) and may be found in Philo (*On*

- the Pharisees maintained this so stubbornly that they considered anyone  
 20 who seemed to think otherwise a heretic. That's why Ibn Ezra, a Man with  
 an independent mind and no slight learning, who was the first of all those  
 I've read to take note of this prejudice, didn't dare to explain his thought  
 openly, but only disclosed the problem in rather obscure terms.<sup>2</sup> I won't  
 be afraid to make them clearer here, and to show the thing itself openly.  
 25 [5] Here are Ibn Ezra's words, as they are found in his commentary  
 on Deuteronomy:

בעבר הירדן וגו' ואם תבין סוד השנים עשר גם ויכתוב משה והכנעני אז בארץ בהר יהיה  
 יראה גם הנה ערשו ערש ברזל תכיר האמת

- Beyond the Jordan etc. . . . provided you understand the mystery of the  
 30 twelve . . . and Moses also wrote the law . . . and the Canaanite was then  
 in the land . . . it will be revealed on the mountain of God . . . then also  
 behold, his bed is a bed of iron . . . then you will know the truth.<sup>3</sup>

[6] With these few words he discloses, and at the same time shows,  
 that it was not Moses who wrote the Pentateuch, but someone else,  
 who lived long afterward, and finally that the book Moses wrote was  
 another one. To show these things, I say, he notes

- [III/119] first, that the preface to Deuteronomy<sup>4</sup> could not have been written by  
 Moses, who never crossed the Jordan.

In addition, he notes [7]

second, that the whole book of Moses was written down very clearly  
 within the expanse of one altar (see Deuteronomy 27[:1–8] and Joshua  
 8:31 etc.), which, according to the account of the Rabbis,<sup>5</sup> consisted of

*the Life of Moses* I, 4, and II, 11), Josephus (*Against Apion* I, 8), Augustine (*Confessions* XII, 17), and the Talmud (see Baba Bathra 14b–15a). The Talmud makes an exception for the last eight verses of Deuteronomy, which describe the death of Moses, and ascribes those verses to Joshua. Maimonides made it a fundamental principle of Judaism that the whole Pentateuch comes to us from God through Moses, “who acted like a secretary taking dictation” (Maimonides *Reader*, 420–21). As the text indicates, Spinoza was not the first to question this tradition. But he does so more openly than Ibn Ezra and more effectively than such more recent doubters as Hobbes and Isaac de la Peyrère. For discussion see Curley 1990b and 2014, and Malcolm 2002.

2. Whether Ibn Ezra really intended to suggest doubts about the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (as Spinoza believed), or merely meant to suggest that there had been a few glosses or slight changes in the text by later editors, is still a matter of dispute. In their foreword to Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Pentateuch, Strickman and Silver claim that Spinoza “totally misrepresented” Ibn Ezra's views (V, xvii).

3. Cf. Ibn Ezra 1988, V, 3.

4. The reference is to Deut. 1:1–5, which begins: “These are the words which Moses spoke unto all Israel, beyond the Jordan, in the wilderness.”

5. The figure of twelve stones is given by Rashi (1960) in his commentary on Deut. 27:8, relying on a passage in the Talmud, Sota 35b.

- 5 only twelve stones. From this it follows that the book of Moses was much smaller in bulk than the Pentateuch.<sup>6</sup>

This, I think, is what the author wanted to signify by *the mystery of the twelve*.

- (Possibly he meant the twelve curses found in Deuteronomy 27[:11–26]. Perhaps he believed they hadn't been written down in the book of the law because Moses commands the Levites, in addition to writing  
10 down the law, to read those curses aloud, so that they might bind the people by an oath to observing the laws which had been written down. Or perhaps he meant to indicate the last chapter of Deuteronomy, concerning the death of Moses, a chapter which consists of twelve verses. But there is no need to examine these things more carefully here, or  
15 those which others may conjecture in addition.)

[8] Next he notes

third, that in Deuteronomy 31:9 it is said that *יכתוב משה את התורה* *Moses wrote the law*. . . . But these can't be the words of Moses; they must be those of another Writer, relating the deeds and writings of Moses.

[9] In addition, he notes

- fourth, the passage in Genesis 12:6, where—relating that Abraham was passing through the land of the Canaanites—the Historian adds that *the Canaanite was then in that land*, by which he clearly separates the time  
20 of the events described from the time when he wrote these words. So these words must have been written after the death of Moses, when the Canaanites had already been driven out and no longer occupied those regions.

In commenting on this passage Ibn Ezra also signifies the same thing with these words

- 25 והכנעני אז בארץ יתכן שארץ כנען תפשה מיד אחר ואם איננו כן יש לו סוד והמשכיל ידום

And the Canaanite was then in that land. It seems that Canaan (the grandson of Noah) seized the land of the Canaanite, which was occupied by someone else. If this is not true, there is some mystery in this matter. Let him who understands this be silent.

- That is, if Canaan invaded those regions, then the meaning will be  
30 that *the Canaanite was already then in that land*, excluding the time past, when it was inhabited by another nation. But if Canaan was the first

6. In his commentary on Deut. 27:8, Ibn Ezra approved the view of Saadia Gaon, that the stones must have contained only the commandments, because they would not have been large enough to contain the entire five books of the Pentateuch. See Ibn Ezra 1988, V, 194.

to cultivate those regions (as follows from Genesis 10), then the Text sets apart the present time, i.e., that of the Writer; and so not the time of Moses, in whose time [the Canaanites] still occupied those regions. This is the mystery he says should be kept quiet.

[III/120] [10] He notes

fifth, that in Genesis 22:14 mount Moriah is called<sup>7\*\*</sup> the mountain of God, a name it didn't have until after it was dedicated to the building of the temple. But this choice of the mountain had not yet been made in the time of Moses. For Moses doesn't indicate that any place has been  
5 chosen by God; on the contrary, he predicts that some day God will choose a place, on which the name of God will be bestowed.

[11] Finally, he notes

sixth, that in Deuteronomy 3 these words are inserted into the story of Og, King of Bashan: *Only Og, King of Bashan, remained of the rest of the giants;*<sup>8\*</sup> *behold, his bed was a bed of iron, certainly this (bed), which is in Rabbah, of the children of Ammon, nine cubits long, etc.* [Deuteronomy 3:11]  
10 This insertion indicates very clearly that the Writer of these books lived long after Moses.<sup>9</sup> For only someone relating events which happened long ago would speak this way, mentioning the remains of the past to induce belief. Doubtless this bed was discovered first in the time of David, who subdued this city (as 2 Samuel 12:30 relates).

15 [12] Not only here, but also a bit below, this same historian inserts in the words of Moses:

*Jair, the son of Manasseh, took the whole territory of Argob, as far as the border of the Gesburites and the Maacathites, and he called those places by his own name, Bashan, villages of Jair, unto this day.* [Deuteronomy 3:14]

20 These words, I say, the Historian added to explain the words of Moses which he had just reported,

*and the rest of Gilead and all of Bashan, the kingdom of Og, I gave to the half-tribe of Manasseh, all the territory of Argob, under the whole of Bashan, which is called the land of the Giants.*

7. \*\*[ADN. IX] By the historian, that is, not by Abraham. For he says that the place which today is called *on the mountain of God it will be revealed* was called by Abraham *God will provide*.

8. \*Note that the Hebrew word רפאים *rephaim* signifies condemned, and seems also to be a proper name in 1 Chron. 20. Therefore I think that here it signifies some family.

9. The Talmud had tried to deal with the fact that the last chapter of Deuteronomy describes the death of Moses by ascribing the last eight verses of that chapter to Joshua. The language to which Spinoza here calls attention not only excludes that hypothesis, but also, by putting the historian at a considerable distance from the events he is describing, raises doubts about his reliability.



[13] Doubtless the Hebrews in this Writer's time knew which were the villages of Jair of the tribe of Judah, but did not know them under  
 25 the name of the territory of Argob, nor of the land of the Giants. So he was forced to explain which places, long ago, used to be called by these names, and at the same time to give a reason why in his time they were identified by the name of Jair, who was of the tribe of Judah, not that of Manasseh (see 1 Chronicles 2:21–22).

[14] With this we've explained Ibn Ezra's opinion, and also the  
 30 passages in the Pentateuch he cites to confirm it. But he didn't note all the passages, or even the main ones. For there are many others worth noting in these books, some more important than the ones he mentioned.

[III/121] [15] First, the Writer of these books not only speaks of Moses in the third person, he also testifies to many things about him, such as:

*God spoke with Moses* [e.g., Numbers 1:1, 2:1, etc.];

*God spoke with Moses face to face* [Exodus 33:11, cf. Numbers 12:8];

*Moses was the most humble of all men* (Numbers 12:3);<sup>10</sup>

*Moses was seized with anger against the leaders of the army* (Numbers 31:14);

5 *Moses, the man of God* (Deuteronomy 33:1);

*Moses, the servant of God, died* [Deuteronomy 34:5];<sup>11</sup>

*Never was there a Prophet in Israel like Moses etc.* [Deuteronomy 34:10].

[16] By contrast, when Deuteronomy records the Law Moses explained to the people, the Law he had written, Moses speaks and relates his deeds in the first person, thus: *God spoke to me* (Deuteronomy  
 10 2:1, 17, etc.), *I prayed to God etc.* [Deuteronomy 9:26]. Then later, at the end of the book [32:44–34:12], after he has reported Moses's words, the historian again speaks in the third person, when he narrates how Moses gave the people, in writing, the law he had explained, how he warned them for the last time, and finally, how he ended his life. All  
 15 these things—the manner of speaking, the testimonies, and the very continuity of the whole history—clearly indicate that these books were not composed by Moses himself, but by someone else.

10. Apparently this verse had long been recognized as a stumbling block for the theory that Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch himself, because that theory required the humblest of men to praise himself for his humility. Cf. HCSB at Num. 12:3, and Kugel 2007, 30–31.

11. Another traditional stumbling block for the theory of Mosaic authorship. The fact that the last chapter of Deuteronomy describes the death of Moses was presumably the reason why the Talmud assigned those verses to Joshua (Baba Bathra 14b–15a), and the reason why Luther ascribed the whole last chapter of Deuteronomy to either Joshua or Eleazar. See his *Lectures on Deuteronomy* in *Works* IX, 310.

[17] Second, note that not only does this history relate how Moses died, was buried, and caused the Hebrews to mourn for thirty days, but when it compares him to the Prophets who lived afterward, it says that he excelled them all. *Never*, [the Writer] says, *was there a Prophet in Israel like Moses, whom God knew face to face*. Obviously Moses couldn't give this testimony about himself. Neither could someone who came immediately after him. Only someone who lived many generations later would speak of the past time as this Historian does: *Never was there a Prophet etc.*, and (of the tomb), *no one knows to this day* [where Moses is buried—Deuteronomy 34:6].<sup>12</sup>

[18] Third, note that certain places are indicated not by the names they had while Moses was alive, but by other names they came to have much later. For example, Abraham *pursued* the enemy *as far as Dan* (see Genesis 14:14), a name that city did not have until long after the death of Joshua (see Judges 18:29).

[19] Fourth, sometimes the Histories too are extended beyond the time of Moses' life. For Exodus 16:34 relates that the children of Israel ate Manna for forty years, until they came to an inhabited land, [III/122] the border of the land of Canaan, i.e., until the time spoken of in Joshua 5:12. Another example: Genesis 36:31 says *These are the kings who reigned in Edom before any king reigned over the children of Israel*. No doubt the historian is speaking there of the kings the Edomites had before David conquered them<sup>13\*\*</sup> and established governors in Edom itself. (See 2 Samuel 8:14.)<sup>14</sup>

[20] From all of this, then, it's clearer than the noon light that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, but by someone who lived many

12. As Hobbes pointed out in *Leviathan* xxxiii, 4, this language is difficult to reconcile with the hypothesis some had entertained, that Moses spoke of his burial place by prophecy.

13. \*\*[ADN. X] From this time until the reign of Jehoram, when they detached themselves from him (2 Kings 8:20), Edom did not have kings, but governors established by the Jews took the place of a king. See 1 Kings 22:48. So the governor of Edom was called a king (2 Kings 3:9). There may be some dispute whether the last of the Edomite kings began to reign before Saul was made king, or whether in this chapter of Genesis Scripture meant only to tell of the kings who died unconquered. Those people who want to list Moses among the Hebrew kings are clearly trifling. The state of the Hebrews he established (by divine agency) was completely different from a monarchic one.

14. The first person to identify this problem for the theory of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch—the fact that Gen. 36:31–39 lists kings who reigned in Edom long after the death of Moses—seems to have been an eleventh-century Jewish court physician in Spain, Isaac ibn Yashush. On this see Friedman 1989, 18–19, who notes the irony that Ibn Ezra (whose cryptic remarks may have prompted Spinoza's doubts about the Mosaic authorship) sharply criticized Isaac for his theory that this chapter was composed in the reign of King Jehoshaphat, and said that Isaac's book deserved to be burned. See Ibn Ezra 1988, I, 341, which makes the suggestion Spinoza dismisses in ADN. X, that Moses can be counted as a king of Israel. Spinoza will return to this passage in ix, 6.

generations after Moses. But please, let's attend also to the books Moses  
 10 did write, which are mentioned in the Pentateuch. From these refer-  
 ences it will be evident that they were different from the Pentateuch.

[21] First, then, it's evident from Exodus 17:14 that by God's com-  
 mand Moses wrote an account of the war against Amalek. That chapter  
 doesn't establish what book he wrote this in, but Numbers 21:14 men-  
 tions a book called *of the wars of God*. No doubt this book related the  
 15 war against Amalek—and also all the encampments which the author  
 of the Pentateuch testifies that Moses described (Numbers 33:2).

[22] Moreover, Exodus 24:4–7 establishes the existence of another  
 book, called ספר הברית *book of the covenant*,<sup>15\*</sup> which he read before  
 20 the Israelites when they first entered into a covenant with God. But  
 this book (*or* this letter) contained only a few things, viz. the laws *or*  
 commands of God related from Exodus 20:22 through 23:33. Anyone  
 who has read that chapter impartially and with sound judgment will  
 acknowledge this. [23] For it's related there that as soon as Moses  
 25 understood the people's intention to enter into a covenant with God,  
 he immediately wrote down God's pronouncements and laws. Then in  
 the morning light, after he had performed certain ceremonies, he read  
 out to the whole assembly the conditions of entering into the covenant.  
 Once these conditions had been read out, and without doubt grasped  
 by all the ordinary people, they bound themselves with full consent. So  
 30 both the shortness of the time it took to write it down, and the nature  
 of the covenant the people were making, show that this book contained  
 nothing beyond the few things I have just mentioned.

[24] Finally, it's evident that in the fortieth year after the departure  
 from Egypt Moses explained all the laws he had promulgated (see  
 Deuteronomy 1:5), and bound the people to them again (see Deuter-  
 [III/123] onomy 29:14), and finally wrote a book which contained the laws he  
 had explained, and this new covenant (see Deuteronomy 31:9). After-  
 ward Joshua added to this book, called *the book of the law of God*, an  
 account of the covenant by which the people bound itself once again,  
 5 in his time. This was the third covenant it entered into with God (see  
 Joshua 24:25–26).

[25] But since we have no book which contains this covenant of Moses  
 together with the covenant of Joshua, we must concede that this book  
 has perished—unless we want to be as crazy as the Chaldean Paraphrast  
 Jonathan,<sup>16</sup> and twist the words of Scripture to our liking. For in the

15. \*NB: In Hebrew ספר *sepher* more often signifies letter *or* scroll. [This explains the  
 parenthetical remark in the next sentence of the text.]

16. Spinoza refers to a work now known as the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, an Ara-  
 maic translation (or paraphrase) of the Pentateuch, traditionally (but it seems wrongly)

10 face of this difficulty, he preferred to corrupt Scripture rather than confess his own ignorance. [26] These words from the book of Joshua

<sup>17</sup> ויכתב יהושע את הדברים האלה בספר תורת האלהים *and Joshua wrote these words in the book of the Law of God* (Joshua 24:26)

he translates into Chaldean as follows

15 וכתב יהושע ית פתגמא האילן ואצנענון בספר אוריתא דיהוה *and Joshua wrote these words and kept them with the book of the Law of God.*

[27] What can you do with people who see nothing but what they want to? What, I ask, is this, but to deny Scripture and to forge a new Scripture out of one's own brain?

We conclude, therefore, that the book of the law of God which Moses wrote was not the Pentateuch, but an altogether different book, which the author of the Pentateuch inserted into his own work in an  
20 orderly way. What we've just said shows this with utmost clarity. So does what is now to be said.

[28] When it's related, in the passage of Deuteronomy just mentioned [31:9], that Moses wrote the book of the law, the historian adds that Moses handed it over to the priests, and that he commanded them to read it out to the whole people at a fixed time [every seventh year]. That  
25 shows that this book was much shorter than the Pentateuch, since it could be read out in this way in one assembly, so that everyone would understand it. [29] We must also not fail to mention here that, of all the books Moses wrote, he commanded them to scrupulously preserve and keep this one of the second covenant and the Song (which he also  
30 wrote afterward, so that the whole people would learn it thoroughly).<sup>18</sup> For by the first covenant he had bound only those who were present, but by the second he bound everyone, even their posterity (see Deuteronomy 29:14–15). So he commanded the book of this second covenant to be preserved scrupulously by future generations—along (as we have said) with the Song, which concerns future generations most especially.

[30] Therefore, since it's not established that Moses wrote other  
[III/124] books besides these, since he didn't command posterity to scrupulously

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ascribed to Jonathan ben Uzziel, a pupil of Hillel (who had in fact produced an Aramaic paraphrase of the prophets). The Buxtorf Bible, which Spinoza owned, reproduced these paraphrases, along with selections from the most prominent medieval commentaries. The Targums played an important role in medieval Jewish liturgy and biblical studies. For more, see ABD VI, 320–21.

17. So Spinoza's text reads. For the final word the Masoretic text reads אלהים.

18. Earlier references to a song ascribed to Moses (at III/39, 90) clearly referred to the song in Exod. 15. But here Spinoza seems to have in mind the song in Deut. 32:1–43.

preserve any other book besides the little Book of the law and the Song, and finally, since many things occur in the Pentateuch which Moses could not have written, it follows that no one has any basis for saying that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch. To claim this is  
5 completely contrary to reason.

[31] But here, perhaps, someone will ask whether Moses didn't also write, besides [the laws of the second covenant and the Song], the laws when they were first revealed to him? In the course of forty years, didn't he write down any of the laws he promulgated, apart from those few which I said [viii, 22] were contained in the book of the first covenant?

10 [32] I reply: though I grant that it seems reasonable for Moses to have written down the laws at the very time and place in which he happened to communicate them, I nevertheless deny that we are entitled to affirm this [simply because it would have been reasonable for him to do so]. For we've shown above that we must maintain nothing about such matters except what is established from Scripture itself, or  
15 which is elicited solely from its foundations by a legitimate principle of inference. We mustn't maintain things of this kind simply because they seem to be consistent with reason.

[33] In any case, reason itself does not compel us to maintain this. For perhaps the assembly of elders communicated Moses' edicts to the people in writing, and afterward the historian collected them and inserted them in an orderly way in the story of Moses' life.

20 This will be enough about the five books of Moses. [34] Now it's time for us to examine the remaining books. By similar reasoning the book of Joshua is also shown not to be an autograph.<sup>19</sup> For it is another person who testifies that Joshua was famous throughout the whole land (see Joshua 6:27), that he omitted none of the things Moses had commanded (see Joshua 8:35, 11:15), that he grew old and called  
25 everyone into an assembly [Joshua 23:1–2], and that after some time he breathed his last [Joshua 24:29].

[35] Secondly, the book of Joshua too relates certain things which happened after Joshua's death: e.g., that after his death the Israelites worshipped God as long as the elders who had known him lived [24:31].

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19. By denying that these books are autographs Spinoza means, not just that our oldest manuscripts are not actually written in the hand of the people to whom tradition assigned authorship, but that they are not even transcripts of any document substantially written by the authors to whom tradition assigned them. The same Talmudic tradition which made Moses the author of (most of) the Pentateuch assigned authorship of the book of Joshua to Joshua, and similarly for the other books Spinoza discusses in this chapter (Baba Bathra 14b–15a).

- And 16:10 relates that Ephraim and Manasseh *did not drive out the*  
 30 *Canaanite who was living in Gezer; but, he adds, the Canaanite dwelled in the midst of Ephraim unto this day and was a slave.* [36] The very same thing is related in the book of Judges (1[:29–30]). And the manner of speaking—*unto this day*—also shows that the Writer is relating things which happened long ago. Similar to this are [Joshua] 15:63, concerning the children of Judah, and the story of Caleb in 15:13. [37] Also the case  
 [III/125] related in 22:10[–33], concerning the two and a half tribes who built an altar beyond the Jordan, seems to have happened after the death of Joshua. In that whole story no mention is made of Joshua, but the people alone considers whether to make war, sends out envoys, waits for their reply, and in the end approves it.
- 5 [38] Finally, it follows clearly from Joshua 10:14 that this book was written many generations after Joshua. For [the author] testifies that *there was no other day like that day, either before or afterward, on which God (thus) obeyed anyone etc.* Therefore, if Joshua ever wrote any book, it was surely the one mentioned in this same story.<sup>20</sup>
- 10 [39] I believe no one of sound mind persuades himself that the book of Judges was written by the Judges themselves.<sup>21</sup> For the summation of the whole story in 2[:6–23] shows clearly that the entire book was written by a single historian. Next, because the Writer of this book frequently reminds us that in those times there was no King in Israel,  
 15 it was doubtless written after kings had achieved rule.<sup>22</sup>
- [40] There's no reason why we should linger long over the books of Samuel, since the story is extended far past his life.<sup>23</sup> Still, I should like to note just this: that this book too was written many generations after Samuel. For in 1 Samuel 9:9 the Historian reminds us in  
 20 a parenthesis that *long ago in Israel, when someone went to consult God, he said "Come, let us go to the seer," for long ago one who is today called a prophet was called a seer.*
- [41] Finally, the books of Kings themselves establish that they are gathered from the books of the acts of Solomon (see 1 Kings 11:41),

20. Josh. 10:13 says that the story of Joshua's commanding the sun to stand still is written in the Book of Jashar, a book which has not survived in the Bible as it has come down to us.

21. Indeed, Talmudic tradition assigned authorship of Judges to Samuel (Baba Bathra 14b–15a).

22. At this point the title of this chapter would lead us to expect a discussion of the book of Ruth. But Spinoza does not discuss its authorship or date, though he will argue later (in §44) that its opening links it with Judges. In Christian Bibles Ruth normally does come immediately after Judges. In the Hebrew Bible it is grouped with the Writings, immediately after the Song of Songs.

23. Nevertheless, Baba Bathra 14b–15a does make Samuel the author of the books bearing his name. Samuel's death is reported in 1 Sam. 25:1.

the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah (see 1 Kings 14:29), and the  
 25 Chronicles of the Kings of Israel (see 1 Kings 14:19).<sup>24</sup>

[42] We conclude, therefore, that all the books enumerated so far are apographs,<sup>25</sup> and relate the things contained in them as having happened long ago.

If now we attend to the connection and theme of all these books, we shall easily infer that they were all written by one and the same  
 25 Historian, who wanted to write about the past history of the Jews from their first origin up to the first destruction of the City.<sup>26</sup> [43] Just from the way these books are connected with one another, we can see that they contain only one narrative of one historian. As soon as he has stopped narrating the life of Moses, he passes to the history of Joshua:

*and it came to pass, after Moses, the servant of God, died, that God said to Joshua etc. [Joshua 1:1]*

[III/126] And when he has finished this story with the death of Joshua, he begins the history of the Judges with the same transition and linkage:

*And it came to pass, after Joshua died, that the children of Israel inquired of God etc. [Judges 1:1]*

[44] And to this book, as an appendix, he attaches the book of Ruth:

5 *And it came to pass, in the days when the Judges judged, that there was a famine in the land. [Ruth 1:1]*

To this, in the same way, he also attaches the first book of Samuel. When this is finished, he proceeds by his customary transition to the second book. And to this, since the story of David was not yet finished, he joins the first book of Kings, and continuing to relate the history of David, in the end he attaches the second book to it with the same linkage.

24. Baba Bathra 14b–15a makes Jeremiah the author of the books of Kings. Spinoza's theory that the books of Kings derived from the lost works it mentions seems now to be generally accepted. Cf. HCSB 474 and ABD IV, 70–71.

25. That is, these books are not autographs in the sense defined in the note to viii, 34.

26. Spinoza refers here to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. In his theory that the primary historical books of the Hebrew Bible—beginning with Genesis and ending with 2 Kings—were in the end the work of one final editor, an historian working in the postexilic period, who wrote a history of his people to demonstrate that the calamities which had befallen them were the result of their disobedience to God's law, Spinoza's picture resembles that offered by David Noel Freedman in Freedman 1994. (Spinoza counts twelve books in this series when he sums up in viii, 57–58, because he counts Ruth as part of the series, and divides Samuel and Kings into two books each. Freedman counts nine books because he does not divide Samuel and Kings and omits Ruth.)



10 [45] Next, the continuity and order of the histories also indicates that there was only one Historian, who set himself a definite goal. For he begins by narrating the first origin of the Hebrew nation, and proceeds by telling in an orderly manner on what occasion and at what times Moses promulgated laws and predicted many things to [the people]. Then he relates how, in accordance with Moses' predictions, they invaded the  
 15 promised land (see Deuteronomy 7), but how, once they had occupied it, they abandoned the laws (Deuteronomy 31:16), and how, as a result, many evils came upon them (Deuteronomy 31:17). Next, the Historian tells how they decided to elect Kings (Deuteronomy 17:14), and relates that things went prosperously for them when the kings heeded the laws, but unhappily when they did not (Deuteronomy 28:36, 68). Finally he  
 20 relates the downfall of the state, as Moses had predicted it.

[46] But as for things which contribute nothing to strengthening the authority of the law, either he passes over them in complete silence or else he refers the reader to other Historians. Therefore, all these books agree in having one purpose, viz. to teach the statements and edicts of Moses, and to demonstrate them through the outcomes of things.

25 [47] These three things taken together—the simplicity of the theme of all these books, the way they are connected, and the fact that they were apographs, written many generations after the events related—lead us to infer that, as we have just said, they were all written by just one  
 30 Historian. [48] Who he was, I cannot show so clearly; but I suspect that he was Ezra.<sup>27</sup> The considerations which combine to prompt this conjecture are not trivial.

[First,] since the Historian (whom we now know to have been only one person) produces a history up to Jehoiachin's release [2 Kings 25:27] and adds, as well, that [25:29–30] Jehoiachin dined at the King's table his whole life (i.e., either Jehoiachin's life or that of Nebuchadnezzar's son—the meaning is quite doubtful), it follows that he was not anyone  
 [III/127] before Ezra. [49] But except for Ezra Scripture doesn't mention anyone who flourished then, who zealously tried to discover God's law and honored it (see Ezra 7:10), and who was a Writer skilled in the Law  
 5 of Moses (see 7:6). So I cannot suspect anyone but Ezra of having written these books.<sup>28</sup>

27. In *Leviathan* xxxiii, 19, Hobbes had reached a similar conclusion, on the basis of two passages in the apocryphal 2 Esdras. Hobbes' argument does not rely on the premise that, because of their unity of theme, the historical books were the work of one author. Indeed, Hobbes does not limit his conclusion to the historical books. For a thorough discussion of the ancestry of the Ezra hypothesis, see Malcolm 2002. See also Curley 1994 and 2014.

28. Spinoza mistakenly thinks that Ezra was among the first wave of those who returned to Jerusalem at the end of the Babylonian captivity. See below, annotation at x, 1. For

[50] Second, we see in this testimony concerning Ezra that he used zeal not only in trying to discover God's law, but also in enhancing it. Moreover, Nehemiah 8:8 also says *that they read the book of God's law explained, and they used their intellect, and they understood the Scripture*.<sup>29</sup>

10 [51] But since the book of Deuteronomy contains not only the book of the law of Moses (or the greatest part of it), but also many things inserted for a fuller explanation, I conjecture from this that the book of Deuteronomy is the book of God's law which they then read—written, enhanced, and explained by Ezra.

[52] When we explained Ibn Ezra's opinion, we gave two examples  
 15 illustrating that many things are inserted parenthetically in the book of Deuteronomy, to explain it more fully. But there are many other examples of this feature in that work. E.g., in Deuteronomy 2:12, *and previously the Horites lived in Seir; but the sons of Esau drove them out and*  
 20 *destroyed them from their sight and dwelled in their place, as Israel did in the land of their inheritance, which God gave them*. This explains 2:3–4, viz. that the sons of Esau, who received mount Seir as an inheritance, were not the first to occupy that land, but that they invaded it and dislodged and destroyed the Horites, who dwelt there previously, as the  
 25 Israelites did to the Canaanites after the death of Moses.

[53] Again, verses 6–9 in Deuteronomy 10 are inserted parenthetically in the words of Moses. For no one fails to see that verse 8, which begins *at that time God set apart the tribe of Levi*, must be related to verse 5, not to the death of Aaron, which Ezra seems to have inserted  
 30 here for no other reason than because, in this account of the calf the people had worshipped, Moses had said that he had prayed to God for Aaron (see Deuteronomy 9:20). Next, he explains that, at the time Moses is speaking of here, God chose the tribe of Levi for himself, so that he might show the reason for the choice, and why the Levites were not called to a share of the possession. This done, he goes on to follow the thread of the history in the words of Moses.

[III/128] [54] To these examples we should add the preface of the book [Deuteronomy 1:1–5] and all those passages which speak of Moses in the

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a summary of the debate over Ezra's work and importance, see ABD II, 726–28, which concludes that there was an historical Ezra, who did some of the things later tradition ascribed to him, but about whom hagiographic legends accumulated.

Some do credit him with editing the Pentateuch in its present form. For argument to this effect, see Friedman 1989, ch. 13. Friedman would not assign the historical sequence from Joshua to 2 Kings to Ezra, arguing instead that the final version of those books is the work of Jeremiah (ch. 7).

29. The text (incorrectly) has Neh. 8:9. I take it that when Spinoza says that Ezra 'enhanced' [*adornandam*] God's law, he means that he offered an interpretation of the law which made it more understandable.

third person. Beyond these, he has added, or expressed in other words, many other things which we cannot now recognize as distinct—doubtless so that the men of his own time would grasp them more easily.

- 5 [55] If we had the book of the law of Moses itself, I say, I don't doubt that we would find a great discrepancy, both in the words and in the order of the precepts and the reasons for them. For when I compare just the Decalogue of this book with the Decalogue of Exodus (where its history is explicitly related), I see that it is inconsistent with the latter in all these respects:<sup>30</sup>

- 10 [i] the fourth commandment [Deuteronomy 5:12–15, Exodus 20:8–11] is not only stated in a different way, it is much longer;
- [ii] the reason given for it differs entirely from the reason offered in Exodus; and finally,
- [iii] the order in which the tenth precept is explained here [Deuteronomy 5:21] is also different from that in Exodus [20:17].

- [56] I think Ezra did these things, both here and in other places, as I've said, because he was explaining the law of God to the men of his  
15 time. That's why he set out and explained this Book of God's Law. And I think this book was the first of all those which I've said he wrote. I conjecture this because it contains the Laws of his Country, which the people most needed, and also because it's not attached to the preceding book by any linkage, as all the others are, but begins with the detached  
20 statement, *These are the words of Moses, etc.*

- [57] But after he finished this, and after he had imparted a thorough knowledge of the law to the people, I believe he then applied his zeal to writing down a complete history of the Hebrew nation, from the origin of the world to the final destruction of the City. In this history he inserted the Book of Deuteronomy in its place. And perhaps he  
25 called its first five books the books of Moses because it's mainly his life which is contained in them, and he took the name from the more important part. [58] For the same reason he also called the sixth book by the name of Joshua, the seventh, Judges, the eighth, Ruth, the ninth and perhaps also the tenth, Samuel, and finally the eleventh and twelfth, Kings. But whether Ezra put the finishing touches on this work, and  
30 brought it to completion in the way he wanted to—that's a topic for the following Chapter.

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30. Cf. above, i, 13.

[III/129]

## CHAPTER IX

*Other questions concerning the same Books,  
e.g., whether Ezra put them in final form,  
and whether the marginal notes  
found in the Hebrew manuscripts  
were variant readings*

5 [1] Just from the passages we've cited to confirm our opinion about the true Writer of these books—passages which without our perspective would have to seem very obscure to anyone—it's easy to infer how much the preceding investigation of this issue aids the perfect understanding of the books. But besides the Writer, there remain other things to be  
10 noted in the books themselves, which the common superstition doesn't permit the common people to recognize.

[2] The most important of these is that Ezra—whom I shall take to be the Writer of the books discussed, until someone establishes another writer with greater certainty—did not put the narratives contained in these books in final form, and did not do anything but collect the nar-  
15 ratives from different writers, sometimes just copying them, and that he left them to posterity without having examined or ordered them.<sup>1</sup>

[3] I can't conjecture what causes prevented him from carrying out this work in every detail, unless perhaps it was an untimely death.

But though we've been deprived of the ancient Hebrew historians,  
20 the few fragments we do have establish with utmost clarity [that Ezra did collect different histories in this way]. [4] For the story of Hezekiah (from 2 Kings 18:17) is copied from Isaiah's account, as it was found written in the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in the book of Isaiah we read this whole story, which was contained in the

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1. Dunin-Borkowski 1933–36, III, 325–26, argued that there is a contradiction between this claim and the preceding chapter's claim that Ezra wrote the historical books under consideration. ALM argue that there is no contradiction, that Ch. viii contends only that Ezra undertook to write a history of Israel—making extensive use of preexisting materials—and that ix, 2, contends only that his execution of this plan was very imperfect.

2. Though the question is evidently still open to debate, the current view seems to be that 2 Kings 18:13–20:19 was the source for the account of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in Isaiah 36–39, rather than Isaiah being the source for 2 Kings. See Anchor Isaiah, I, 459. At 2 Kings 18:13 HCSB comments that “The narrative includes much traditional material and shows signs of having gone through a long editorial history.”

25 Chronicles of the Kings of Judah<sup>3</sup> (see 2 Chronicles 32:32), related in the same words as here, with only a very few exceptions.<sup>4\*\*</sup> From these exceptions the only conclusion we can draw is that various readings of Isaiah's narrative were found—unless someone prefers to dream of mysteries in these things also.

[5] Again, the last chapter of this book [2 Kings] is also contained in 30 the last chapter of Jeremiah and in chapters 39 and 40 of that work.<sup>5</sup> In addition, we find 2 Samuel 7 copied in 1 Chronicles 17.<sup>6</sup> But we discover that the words in the different passages are so remarkably changed<sup>7\*\*</sup> that we may easily recognize that these two chapters were [III/130] taken from two different copies of the story of Nathan.

[6] Finally, the Genealogy of the Kings of Edom, treated in Genesis 36:31[–39], is also described in the same words in 1 Chronicles 1[:43–51], though it is manifest, nevertheless, that the author of this book has taken the things he narrates from other Historians, but not 5 from the twelve books we've attributed to Ezra.<sup>8</sup>

[7] There is no doubt that if we had these Historians, this conclusion would be established directly. But because, as I've said, we have been deprived of them, the only thing remaining for us is to examine the histories [which have survived]: their order and connection, the variations 10 in their repetitions, and finally, the discrepancy in the computation of years. In this way we can judge of the others.

3. One of the historical sources for our present Bible which it refers to, but does not include.

4. \*\*[ADN. XI] E.g., in 2 Kings 18:20 we read in the second person אמרת, *you have said, but these are only words, etc.*, whereas in Isaiah 36:5 we read אמרתי, *I have said, surely these are words, that in war there is a need for counsel and strength*. Again, in 2 Kings 18:22 we read וכי תאמרן, *but perhaps you will say*, in the plural; but in Isaiah's copy [36:7] this is in the singular. Moreover, in the text of Isaiah we do not read these words (from 2 Kings 18:32) ארץ זית יצהר ודבש וחיו ולא תמתו ואל-תשמעו אל-חזקיהו [*a land of olive oil and honey, so that you may live and not die. Don't listen to Hezekiah*]. In this way there are many other variant readings. No one will be able to determine which should be chosen in preference to the others.

5. On the relationship between 2 Kings and Jeremiah, see Anchor Kings, II, 320–21.

6. On the relationship between 2 Sam. 7 and 1 Chron. 17, see Anchor Chronicles, II, 662–64.

7. \*\*[ADN. XII] E.g., in 2 Samuel 7:6 we read וואהיה מתהלך באהל ובמשכן, *and I have continually wandered with a tent and a tabernacle*, whereas in 1 Chronicles 17:5 we read וואהיה מאהל אל-אהל וממשכן, *and I went from tent to tent and from tabernacle*, with מתהלך changed into מאהל, into ממשכן, and אל-אהל into אהל, into מאהל. Again, 2 Samuel 7:10 reads ונזף, *to afflict him*, and 1 Chronicles 17:9 reads לבלתו, *to waste him*. And in this way everyone who is neither completely blind nor altogether mad, and who has once read these chapters, will notice many discrepancies, and others of greater importance.

8. The information about the kings of Edom in Genesis is almost identical to that in 1 Chronicles, except that the last verse of this section in Chronicles reports the death of Hadad. HCSB comments that "this addition makes the chiefs [whose names immediately follow] clearly subsequent to the list of Edomite kings."

[8] Let us, then, carefully assess at least the principal narratives, taking first that of Judah and Tamar, which the Historian begins to relate in Genesis 38: *And it happened at that time that Judah departed from his brothers* [38:1]. This time must be related to another<sup>9\*\*</sup> which he has just  
 15 spoken of. But it can't be related to the time just discussed in Genesis.<sup>10</sup> For we can't count more than twenty-two years from the time Joseph was taken to Egypt to the time the Patriarch Jacob also went there with his whole family. [9] When Joseph was sold by his brothers, he was seventeen  
 20 [Gen. 37:2]; he was thirty when Pharaoh ordered him to be released from prison [41:46]. If we add to these [thirteen years] the seven years of fertility [41:47] and two years of famine [45:6], that makes twenty-two years.<sup>11</sup>

[10] But no one can conceive that so many things could have happened in this length of time: viz. that Judah had three sons, one after another,  
 25 by the one wife he had then married; that the eldest of these, when his age permitted, married Tamar; that after the first son had died, the second took Tamar as his wife; that the second son also died; and that some time after all these things happened, Judah himself unknowingly

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9. \*\*[ADN. XIII] That this text concerns only the time when Joseph was sold is not established only from the context of the statement. It may also be inferred from Judah's age. At that time he was twenty-two at most, if we may make a calculation from the preceding narrative about him. For it is evident from Genesis 29:35 that Judah was born in the tenth year after the Patriarch Jacob began to serve Laban; but Joseph was born in the fourteenth year. [For this claim concerning the year of Joseph's birth, see the note to §12.] Since Joseph was seventeen years old when he was sold, Judah at that time was no more than twenty-one. So those who believe that Judah's long absence from home happened before Joseph was sold are deluding themselves, and are more anxious about the divinity of Scripture than certain of it.

10. Gen. 37 had concluded by reporting the sale of Joseph to the Egyptians. Gen. 38 interrupts the narrative about Joseph with the story of Judah and Tamar, which Spinoza summarizes in §10. The problem is that the events recounted in Gen. 38 are supposed to have begun when Joseph was sold into bondage in Egypt and that twenty-two years later, when Judah moved to Egypt, he was accompanied not only by the children he had by Tamar, but also by the two grandchildren he had through one of her sons (as we learn in Gen. 46:12).

Worries about the chronology of Gen. 38 go back to *Seder Olam*, a biblical commentary from the second century C.E. *Seder Olam* is able to squeeze all these events into the twenty-two years which it supposes to have passed between the sale of Joseph and Judah's move to Egypt by assuming that Judah's sons by Shua's daughter and Tamar all married at the age of seven. See *Seder Olam* 2005, 32–34.

In his commentary on Gen. 38:1 Ibn Ezra rejected this solution, arguing that procreation starts at twelve at the earliest. His solution is that the phrase "at that time" does not (as we might have expected) refer to the time mentioned in the immediately preceding verse—the time when Joseph was sold—but to an earlier time. He does not say when that time was, and it is hard to see when it could have been, consistently with Judah's participation in the sale of Joseph in Gen. 37. See Ibn Ezra 1988, I, 354–55. Spinoza therefore proposes an alternative theory of the text.

11. This is the traditional calculation, as given in *Seder Olam* 2005, 30–31 (and assumed by Ibn Ezra in his commentary on Gen. 38).

had relations with his own daughter-in-law, Tamar, by whom he begot two more sons (though in one birth); and that one of these sons also  
30 became a father—all within the time previously mentioned.

[11] Since not all these events can be related to the time in question in Genesis, they must be related to another time, treated just previously in another book. Ezra, then, has merely copied this story, and inserted it among the others, without having examined it.

[12] But it must be confessed that, not only this chapter, but the  
[III/131] whole story of Joseph and Jacob is so full of inconsistencies that it must have been culled from different historians and copied out.<sup>12</sup> For Genesis 47 relates that when Joseph first brought Jacob to greet Pharaoh, Jacob was 130 years old. If we subtract from that the twenty-two years he  
5 spent in grief because of Joseph's absence, as well as the seventeen years of Joseph's age when he was sold, and finally the seven years he served because of Rachel, it will be found that he was very, very old—eighty-four in fact—when he married Leah. On the other hand, Dinah was  
10 hardly seven,<sup>13\*\*</sup> when Shechem raped her, and Simeon and Levi were hardly twelve and eleven when they pillaged that whole city and put all its citizens to the sword.<sup>14</sup>

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12. A clearer example than the one Spinoza gives, perhaps, is that twice Jacob is told that he will no longer be called Jacob, but will henceforth be known as Israel. (See Gen. 32:28 and 35:10.) But he continues to be called Jacob after that, though not consistently. Sometimes he is called Israel. (E.g., in Gen. 35:20, 35:22b, and 37:1–2 he is called Jacob. In Gen. 35:21–22a, 37:3, and 37:13, he is called Israel.) This was a classic problem, addressed by Manasseh ben Israel in his *Conciliator*, 1842/1972, I, 82–84. For other inconsistencies in the Joseph-Jacob stories, see Anchor Genesis, xxxiii.

13. \*\*[ADN. XIV] For what some people think—viz. that Jacob traveled between Mesopotamia and Bethel for eight or ten years—smacks of foolishness. I might have said this, with all due respect to Ibn Ezra. For Jacob hurried as much as he could, not only because of the desire to see his parents which no doubt possessed him, but also to fulfill the vow he had made (see Gen. 28:20 and 31:13).

But if these seem to be conjectures rather than reasons, let's grant that, by a fate worse than that which befell Ulysses, Jacob spent eight or ten additional years on this short journey—or more, if you like. Certainly they will not be able to deny that Benjamin was born in the last year of this travel [35:16–18], i.e., according to their hypothesis, in about the fifteenth or sixteenth year after Joseph was born. For Jacob said good-bye to Laban in the seventh year after the birth of Joseph. But from Joseph's seventeenth year to the year in which the patriarch himself went to Egypt, there were not more than twenty-two years, as we have shown in this chapter [§9]. And so Benjamin was twenty-three or twenty-four at most when he went to Egypt. But though he was thus in the flower of his youth, it is established that he had grandchildren (see Genesis 46:21, and compare it with Numbers 26:38–40 and 1 Chronicles 8:1ff.). This, of course, is no less unreasonable than to maintain that Dinah was raped at the age of seven, and the other things we have deduced from the order of this history. So it is plain that when inexperienced men try to solve these difficulties, they fall into others, and complicate and mangle the situation more.

14. The point in this paragraph seems to be, not so much that the narrative contains inconsistencies in the strict sense, as that it contains serious improbabilities. A very old man



- [13] There's no need for me to review everything in the Pentateuch here. If you just attend to this—that all the precepts and stories in these five books are related indiscriminately, without order, with no  
 15 account taken of the times, and that one and the same story is often repeated, sometimes in a different way<sup>15</sup>—you will easily see that all these things have been collected and piled up indiscriminately, so that afterward they might be more easily examined and reduced to order.
- [14] This is true not only of the narratives in the Pentateuch, but  
 20 also of the other narratives in the remaining seven books, down to the destruction of the city. They were collected in the same way. Who does not see that in Judges 2, from v. 6, a new Historian is brought in (who had also written of the things Joshua did), and that his words are simply

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acts with the passion we might more naturally expect of a very young man; preadolescent boys talk and act in a way we might find more credible in adults; and a very young girl is the victim of a sexual assault. Perhaps not all of these things are quite as improbable as Spinoza thinks, but taken collectively they seem a lot to swallow.

Spinoza's estimate of Jacob's age at the time of his marriage to Leah is based on the following calculations. First, he assumes, on the basis of the data presented in §9 of the text, that Jacob grieved twenty-two years because of Joseph's absence. Given that Jacob was 130 when Joseph presented him to the Pharaoh (47:9), if we subtract the twenty-two years of grief, plus the seventeen years of Joseph's age when sold into slavery, and the seven years Jacob served Laban during his marriage to Leah and the birth of Joseph, we get eighty-four. *Genesis Rabbah* (II, 618) had already reached this result by a different route.

We must not suppose, as some do, that Jacob had to wait seven years between his marriage to Leah and his marriage to Rachel. Gen. 29:26–30 says he waited only a week. He was permitted to marry Rachel *before* he served his second seven years of service. But Rachel was barren for several years before she had Joseph. The traditional assumption was that the twelve children born to Jacob in Paddan-Aram were all born during the second seven-year period. See Ibn Ezra 1988, I, 288 (and *Seder Olam* 2005, 23). Spinoza is content to make the traditional assumption. As Ibn Ezra had pointed out, counting the two handmaidens, there were four women involved, some of whom may have been pregnant concurrently. To account for the birth of twelve children in seven years, it is not necessary to assume that all the children were born prematurely.

Spinoza's estimate of the ages of Dinah, Simeon, and Levi at the time of the rape is the estimate Ibn Ezra makes of their ages when they arrived in Shechem. See his commentary on Gen. 33:20 (1988, I, 326). But Ibn Ezra assumes that Jacob and his family stayed in Shechem for many years before proceeding on to Bethel. He does not say why, but presumably thought this assumption was necessary to explain the events of Gen. 34. ADN. XIV is designed to block this move.

15. The recognition that the scriptural text often contains alternate versions of the same story—as, for example, the two separate versions of the creation story in Gen. 1–2:4a and Gen. 2:4b–3:24, or the two blended versions of the flood story in Gen. 6:5–8:22—was an important step in the development of the Documentary Hypothesis. On this see Friedman 1989, ch. 2, or Coogan 2006, chs. 1 and 2. Spinoza is keenly aware of the existence of these “doublets” and the inconsistencies between them. He would have found the inconsistencies between the various accounts of the creation and the flood, for example, discussed in Manasseh's *Conciliator*, questions 3, 5, 9, 12, 28, 29, and 31. The Joseph-Jacob stories are another example where two different stories have been blended. Cf. Anchor Genesis, xxxiii.

copied out?<sup>16</sup> For after our Historian related (in Joshua 24) that Joshua  
 25 died and was buried, and after he promised at the beginning of this  
 book [Judges] to relate what happened after Joshua's death, how, if he  
 wanted to follow the thread of his story, could he have connected what  
 he begins to relate here, about Joshua, with what he has just said?<sup>17\*\*</sup>

[15] Similarly, chapters 17, 18, etc., of 1 Samuel are selected from  
 another Historian, who thought there was another reason why David  
 30 began to attend Saul's court, a reason very different from the one related  
 in 1 Samuel 16. He didn't think David went to Saul because Saul had  
 called him, on the advice of his servants (as related in 16[:17–19]), but  
 thought that, his father having sent him by chance to his brothers in  
 Saul's camp, he became known to Saul only on the occasion of the vic-  
 tory he had against the Philistine, Goliath. Only then was he kept in  
 [III/132] the court [17:55–18:2]. I suspect the same thing of 1 Samuel 26 —that  
 the historian seems to relate there the same story treated in ch. 24,  
 according to the opinion of someone else.<sup>18</sup>

[16] But I pass over all this, and proceed to examine the chronology.  
 5 In 1 Kings 6[:1] it is said that Solomon built the temple 480 years after  
 the departure from Egypt.<sup>19</sup> But from the individual narratives we infer  
 a much greater number. [17] For

Moses governed the people in the wilderness for . . .	40 years <sup>20</sup>
In the opinion of Josephus and others, we attribute to Joshua	
10 (who lived 110 years) a reign of not more than . . .	26 years <sup>21</sup>

16. The discontinuities and repetitions which occur in the passages connecting Joshua to Judges (from Josh. 24:29 through Judg. 2:10) have led the most recent twentieth-century editor to propose that the central portions of Judges (2:6–15:20) are an eighth-century editor's collection of old stories, which later editors have embedded in a Deuteronomistic or Deuteronomistic framework. See Anchor Judges, 29–38, and its comments on Judges 1–2.

17. \*\*[ADN. XV] That is, in other terms and in another order than are found in the book of Joshua. [This adnotation occurs only in two of our sources, Saint-Glain and KB. Its authenticity is doubtful.]

18. On the relation between these two versions of a story in which David spares Saul's life, see Anchor Samuel, I, 385–87, 409–10.

19. By the time of Manasseh ben Israel's *Conciliator* there had been a long history of attempts to reconcile the numbers. Cf. his comment on Judges 11:26 (1842/1972, II, 29–34). Though Spinoza never explicitly mentions Manasseh, it seems clear that Proietti 1997 is right to argue that he has him in mind in this passage. Manasseh's way of setting up the problem is very close to the one Spinoza uses in §17. He then canvasses several possible solutions before proposing his own, which makes what sometimes seem to be rather arbitrary assumptions about how long those judges governed whose periods of government Scripture does not specify. He does not consider the difficulties Spinoza raises in §§18–26.

20. See, for example, Num. 32:13 or Josh. 5:6.

21. See Josephus, *Antiquities* V, i, 29 (which, however, gives 25 as the number of years Joshua ruled).

Cushan-rishathaim had the people in subjection for ...	8 years <sup>22</sup>
Othniel, the son of Kenaz, judged <sup>23**</sup> for ...	40 years <sup>24</sup>
Eglon, king of Moab, ruled the people for ...	18 years <sup>25</sup>
Ehud and Shamgar were judges for ...	80 years <sup>26</sup>
15 Jabin, king of Canaan, had the people in subjection ...	20 years <sup>27</sup>
Afterward the people had peace for ...	40 years <sup>28</sup>
Then the people were in subjection to the Midianites for ...	7 years <sup>29</sup>
In the time of Gideon the people were free for ...	40 years <sup>30</sup>
They were under the rule of Abimelech for ...	3 years <sup>31</sup>

22. See Judg. 3:8.

23. \*\*[ADN. XVI] Rabbi Levi ben Gerson and others believe that these forty years, which Scripture says passed in freedom [Judges 3:11], nevertheless begin with the death of Joshua, and so include the preceding eight years, in which the people were subject to Cushan-rishathaim, and that the eighteen years which followed [Judges 3:14] are also to be included in the eighty years that Ehud and Shamgar judged. Thus they believe that remaining years of bondage are always included under those Scripture says passed in freedom. But because Scripture expressly reckons how many years the Hebrews spent in bondage and how many in freedom, and in Judges 2:18 expressly tells us that the Hebrews always flourished under the judges, it is quite evident that this Rabbi (otherwise a very learned man) and those who follow in his footsteps are correcting Scripture, rather than explaining it, when they try to resolve such difficulties.

So do those who maintain that in that general calculation of years Scripture wanted to indicate only the periods when there was a Jewish state, and could not have included in the general account the years of anarchy or of bondage, as being inauspicious and, as it were, interruptions of the government. For indeed, Scripture usually does pass over in silence periods of anarchy; but it usually treats years of bondage no less than those of freedom, nor is it accustomed, as they fancy, to delete them from the annals.

That Ezra meant to include, in that general summing up of years in 1 Kings [6], absolutely all the years from the exodus from Egypt is a thing so manifest that no one practiced in Scripture has ever questioned it. For to pass over now the words of the text itself, the Genealogy of David given at the end of Ruth [4:18–22] and in 1 Chronicles 2[:11–15] hardly allows so large a sum of years. For Nahshon was the leader of the tribe of Judah in the second year after the exodus from Egypt (see Numbers 7:11–12). So he died in the wilderness, and his son Salmon crossed the Jordan with Joshua. But this Salmon, according to the Genealogy of David, was David's great-great-grandfather. If we subtract from this sum of 480 years the four years of Solomon's reign, the seventy years of David's life, and the forty passed in the desert, we will find that David was born in the 366th year after the crossing of the Jordan and consequently, that it is necessary that his father, grandfather, great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather fathered children when each of them was ninety years old.

24. See Judg. 3:11.

25. See Judg. 3:14.

26. Spinoza's basis for this is presumably Judg. 3:30–31, though those verses suggest that the period of 80 years mentioned in 3:30 counts only the period when Ehud was a judge. The text gives no information about the length of time Shamgar was a judge.

27. See Judg. 4:3.

28. This would be during the period when Deborah and Barak were judges. Judg. 4–5.

29. See Judg. 6:1.

30. See Judg. 8:28.

31. See Judg. 9:22.

20	Tola, the son of Puah, judged for ...	23 years <sup>32</sup>
	Jair judged for ...	22 years <sup>33</sup>
	The people were in subjection to the Philistines and the Ammonites for ...	18 years <sup>34</sup>
	Jephthah judged for ...	6 years <sup>35</sup>
	Ibzan of Bethlehem judged for ...	7 years <sup>36</sup>
25	Elon the Zebulunite judged for ...	10 years <sup>37</sup>
	Abdon the Pirathonite judged for ...	8 years <sup>38</sup>
	The people were in subjection to the Philistines for ...	40 years <sup>39</sup>
	Samson judged <sup>40**</sup> for ...	20 years <sup>41</sup>
	Eli judged for ...	40 years <sup>42</sup>
30	Before Samuel freed them, the people were again in subjection to the Philistines for ... 20 years <sup>43</sup>	
	David reigned ...	40 years <sup>44</sup>
	Before Solomon built the temple, he reigned for ...	4 years <sup>45</sup>

[III/133] The sum of all these years is 580.<sup>46</sup>

[18] To these years we must add, next, those of the period in which, after the death of Joshua, the Hebrew Republic flourished (before Cushan-rishathaim subjugated it [Judges 3:8]). I believe this period

32. Judg. 10:2.

33. Judg. 10:3.

34. Judg. 10:7–8.

35. Judg. 12:7.

36. Judg. 12:9.

37. Judg. 12:11.

38. Judg. 12:14.

39. Judg. 13:1.

40. \*\*[ADN. XVII] Samson was born after the Philistines had subjugated the Hebrews. [Saint-Glavin: One might doubt whether these twenty years should be counted under the years of freedom or whether they are included in the forty immediately preceding years, during which the people were under the yoke of the Philistines. For myself, I confess that I find it more probable and credible that the Hebrews recovered their freedom when the leaders of the Philistines perished with Samson. Also, I have counted these twenty years of Samson among those during which the yoke of the Philistines lasted only because Samson was born after the Philistines had subjugated the Hebrews, besides the fact that in the treatise on the Sabbath there is mention of a certain book on Jerusalem, where it is said that Samson judged the people forty years. But it is not a question only of these years.]

41. Judg. 15:20.

42. 1 Sam. 4:18.

43. 1 Sam. 7:2.

44. 1 Kings 2:11.

45. 1 Kings 6:1.

46. In his *Antiquities* VIII, iii, 1, Josephus had given a figure of 592 years between the exodus and the building of the temple, but had not discussed the inconsistency between that figure and 1 Kings 6:1.

lasted many years. For I cannot persuade myself that immediately  
 5 after the death of Joshua everyone who had seen his wonders perished  
 at once, and that the next generation straightaway abandoned the  
 laws and fell from the pinnacle of virtue to the depths of profligacy  
 and negligence. Nor can I believe that no sooner had this happened  
 than Cushan-rishathaim subjugated them. [19] But since each of these  
 10 developments requires almost a generation, there is no doubt that in  
 Judges 2:7, 9 and 10, Scripture covers the stories of many years, which  
 it has passed over in silence.<sup>47</sup>

We must also add [to the figure of 580] the years during which  
 Samuel was a Judge, which are not given in Scripture, [20] and the years  
 of the reign of Saul, which I omitted in the above calculation, because  
 15 what Scripture says about him does not adequately establish how long  
 he reigned. It is said, indeed, in 1 Samuel 13:1, that Saul reigned for  
 two years, but that text is mutilated and from the narrative itself we  
 infer a greater number of years. [21] That the text is mutilated, no one  
 who has even the slightest acquaintance with the Hebrew language can  
 20 doubt. For it begins thus: *בן שנה שאול במלכו ושתי שנים מלך על ישראל*, *Saul*  
*was a year old when he reigned, and he reigned over Israel for two years*.  
 Who, I ask, does not see that the text omits Saul's age when he began  
 to reign?<sup>48</sup> [22] But I believe no one doubts that the account of his  
 reign implies that it lasted longer than two years. For 1 Samuel 27:7  
 25 mentions that David stayed among the Philistines, to whom he fled on  
 account of Saul, for a year and four months. So from this calculation  
 the remaining events must have happened in eight months. I suppose  
 no one believes this. Josephus, at least, at the end of book six of his  
*Antiquities*, corrects the text in the following way: *Saul, therefore, reigned*  
 30 *for eighteen years while Samuel was alive, and for two more after his death*.<sup>49</sup>

47. The presence of multiple authors/editors in the first three chapters of Judges makes the chronology of the events described there very unclear, but Spinoza's verdict seems reasonable. See §14 and the annotation there.

48. Modern translations acknowledge the defectiveness of the text. The NRSV translation reads as follows: "Saul was . . . years old when he began to reign; and he reigned . . . and two years over Israel." The HCSB annotation comments that in the first lacuna the number is lacking in the Hebrew text, and that in the second, "two is not the entire number; something has dropped out." Similarly in the NJPS edition and Anchor Samuel. The problem is not just the improbability of Saul's beginning his reign at the age of one, but, as Manasseh puts it, that "so many events took place during Saul's reign, that it seems incredible that they could have occurred in the small space of two years" (1842/1972, II, 46). When Manasseh discusses this passage (in Part II, questions 8 and 12), rather than question the integrity of the text, he proposes metaphorical interpretations of the passage.

49. Josephus, *Antiquities* VI, xiv, 9. This quotation indicates that Spinoza is reading Josephus in the Latin translation made by the order of Cassiodorus. The Greek text says that Saul reigned for twenty-two years after the death of Samuel. For further discussion, see ALM.

[23] Indeed, this whole narrative in chapter 13 does not agree at all with the preceding chapters. At the end of chapter 7 it is related that the Philistines were so subdued by the Hebrews that they did not dare to cross the borders of Israel during the life of Samuel.<sup>50</sup> But here [in ch. 13, it is related] that (while Samuel was still alive) the Philistines invaded the Hebrews and reduced them to such wretchedness and poverty that they were left without arms to defend themselves, or even the means of making arms. [24] It would surely cost me sweat enough if I were to try to reconcile all the accounts contained in this first book of Samuel so that they all looked like they were written down and ordered by one Historian. But, to return to the point I was making, we must add the years of Saul's reign to the above calculation.

[25] Finally, I have also not counted the years of anarchy of the Hebrews,<sup>51</sup> because Scripture does not establish what that number was. That is to say, I do not find it established what that period was in which the events narrated in Judges 17–21 happened.

[26] These considerations show very clearly that we cannot establish a correct calculation of the years [between the exodus and the building of the temple] from the narratives themselves and that the narratives do not agree in one and the same calculation, but presuppose quite different ones. So we must confess that these narratives were gathered from different writers, and still haven't been put in order or examined.

[27] There seems to have been no less a discrepancy concerning the calculation of years in the books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah and the books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.<sup>52</sup> For it was said in the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel that Jehoram, the son of Ahab, began to reign in the second year of the reign of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat (see 2 Kings 1:17). But in the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah, it was held that Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat

50. The reference is to 1 Sam. 7:13–14, verses whose inconsistency with other parts of the narrative troubled commentators as long ago as Kimchi, who interpreted the phrase “all the days of Samuel” to mean “all the years in which Samuel exercised sole authority, before he became old and delegated his duties to his sons.” The consensus of modern editors is to regard them as insertions of the Deuteronomic editor. Cf. Anchor Samuel, I, 147.

51. That is, the years following the death of Samson, in which no king ruled, and no judge is mentioned.

52. Spinoza explains the inconsistency between 2 Kings 1:17 and 2 Kings 8:16 by contending that the editors of 2 Kings relied on inconsistent sources, now lost, without eliminating the inconsistency. Kimchi had explained the inconsistency by supposing that Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, began to reign while his father was still alive, but did not officially become king until his death, which was in the fifth year of the reign of Jehoram, the son of Ahab. Some later commentators accepted this solution (ALM).

began to reign in the fifth year of the reign of Jehoram, the son of Ahab (see 2 Kings 8:16).

[28] If anyone wants to compare the narratives of the book of Chronicles with those of the books of Kings, he will find numerous similar discrepancies, which I don't need to recount here.<sup>53</sup> Much less do I need to discuss the devices authors use to try to reconcile these  
 25 accounts. For the Rabbis are completely crazy. The commentators I have read indulge in idle fancies and hypotheses, and in the end, completely corrupt the language itself. [29] For example, when it is said in 2 Chronicles [22:2] that *Abaziah was forty-two years old when he reigned*, some indulge in the hypothesis that these years are calculated from the reign of Omri, not from the birth of Ahaziah.<sup>54</sup> If they could  
 30 show that this was what the author of the books of Chronicles meant, I wouldn't hesitate to say that he didn't know how to express himself. And they invent many other things of this kind. If these things were true, I would say, without qualification, that the ancient Hebrews were completely ignorant both of their own language and of how to tell a story in an orderly way. I wouldn't recognize any principle or standard  
 [III/135] for interpreting Scripture. Instead, we could invent anything we like.

[30] If anyone thinks I'm speaking too generally here, and without adequate foundation, I ask him to show us some definite order in these accounts, which Historians could imitate without fault in their Chronicles. And while he's interpreting these accounts and trying to  
 5 reconcile them, let him respect the expressions and ways of speaking, and of organizing and connecting statements, so strictly, and let him explain them in such a way, that we too could imitate them in our writing, according to his explanation.<sup>55\*\*</sup> If he does this, I'll immediately surrender to him, and he'll be a great oracle for me.<sup>56</sup> [31] For  
 10 I confess that although I've long sought such an explanation, I've still never been able to find anything like it. I add that I write nothing here which I haven't thought about long and hard. Although I was instructed from childhood in the common opinions concerning Scripture, in the

53. In his discussion of 1 and 2 Kings in his *Conciliator* Manasseh identifies nearly two dozen passages where the accounts in those books are prima facie inconsistent with those in 1 and 2 Chronicles.

54. By contrast, 2 Kings 8:26 gives Ahaziah's age as twenty-two at the beginning of his reign. In Part II, qu. 41, Manasseh discusses this problem (recognized as early as *Seder Olam*) and ascribes the solution Spinoza rejects to Gersonides. For the proposals of Rashi and Kimchi, see ALM.

55. \*\*[ADN. XVIII] Otherwise they correct the words of Scripture rather than explain them.

56. Literally, "he will be a great Apollo for me," echoing a line from Virgil's *Eclogues* III, 404.



end I couldn't help but admit these things.<sup>57</sup> But there's no reason to detain the reader long regarding these matters, or to challenge him to  
 15 such a hopeless task. It was only necessary to propose this to explain my position more clearly. [32] Now I proceed to the other things I've undertaken to note concerning the fate of these books.

What needs to be noted, in addition to the things we've just shown, is that Posterity hasn't preserved these books with such diligence that  
 20 no errors have crept in. For the early Scribes noticed many doubtful readings, as well as some (though not all) of the mutilated passages. I'm not arguing now that these errors are such as to make difficulties for the reader. I believe they are of little importance, at least for those who read the Scriptures with a more independent judgment. This I can certainly affirm: that I haven't noticed, concerning moral teachings,  
 25 any error, or any alternative reading, which could make them obscure or doubtful.

[33] But most people don't admit that any defect at all has cropped up even in the other parts of Scripture. Instead they maintain that by a certain particular providence God has kept the whole Bible uncorrupted.<sup>58</sup> They say the variant readings are signs of the most profound  
 30 mysteries, and they allege the same about the asterisks which occur in the middle of a paragraph twenty-eight times.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, they claim that great secrets are contained in the very markings of the letters.<sup>60</sup>

[34] I don't know whether they've said these things out of foolishness and credulous devotion, or out of arrogance and malice, so that they alone would be believed to possess God's secrets. I do know this: I've read nothing in their writings which had the air of a secret, but only childish thoughts. I've also read, and for that matter, known personally,  
 [III/136] ally, certain Kabbalistic triflers. I've never been able to be sufficiently amazed by their madness.<sup>61</sup>

[35] But I believe no one doubts that errors have crept in—not any-one of sound judgment, anyway, who has read that text about Saul (the one we appealed to above [in §20], 1 Samuel 13:1), and also 2 Samuel

57. A rare and important autobiographical statement, which unfortunately presents translation problems. I have rendered *imbutus fuerim* as *I was instructed in*; Elwes has *I was imbued with*. Either is possible; Elwes' rendering suggests that for a long time Spinoza accepted the views he was taught; mine allows the possibility that Spinoza may have become skeptical about those teachings at an early age.

58. This was, for example, the view of the Westminster Confession. See ch. I, sec. viii.

59. Later (in ix, 63) Spinoza will give Gen. 4:8 as an example.

60. ALM note that Johannes Buxtorf seems to be among those under attack here.

61. Possibly a reference to Manasseh ben Israel, though he would not have been the only Kabbalist in the Amsterdam Jewish community. See Katchen 1984, ch. 2. And on the Kabbalah generally, see Scholem 1974. ALM note that Spinoza possessed works by Joseph del Medigo and doubtless knew Abraham Herrera's *Puerta del Cielo*.

5 6:2, and David arose and went, with all the people who were with him from Judah, that they might carry off the ark of God from there. Here also no one can fail to see that the place they went to has been omitted—that is, Kirjath-jearim,<sup>62\*\*</sup> from which they carried off the ark.<sup>63</sup>

[36] We also can't deny that 2 Samuel 13:37 is confused and mutilated:  
10 and Absalom fled and went to Talmai, the son of Ammibud, king of Gesbur, and he mourned his son every day, and Absalom fled and went to Gesbur and stayed there three years.<sup>64\*\*</sup> I know that previously I have noted other things of this kind, but at the moment I cannot recall them.

[37] The marginal notes<sup>65</sup> found throughout the Hebrew Manuscripts  
15 were doubtful readings. If you attend to the fact that most of them have arisen from the great similarity some Hebrew letters have to others, you will not be able to doubt this. כ *kaf* is very similar to ב *bet*, י *jod* to ו *vau*, ד *dalet* to ר *res*, and so on. So, in 2 Samuel 5:24, where it is written, בשמעך, and in that (time) in which you hear, in the margin  
20 there is כשמעך, when you hear, and in Judges 21:22, where it is written, ויהיה כי יבואו אבותם או אחיהם לרוב, and when their fathers or brothers come to us in a multitude (i.e., often), in the margin there is לריב, to dispute.

[38] Similarly, a great many variant readings have arisen from the use of the letters they call Quiescent, letters whose pronunciation is

62. \*\*[ADN. XIX] Kirjath-jearim is also called Baale-judah. So Kimchi and others think that *baale yebudab*, which I have here translated from the people of Judah, is the name of the town. But they are mistaken, because *baale* is plural in number. Again, if we compare this text of Samuel with the one in 1 Chronicles [13:6], we shall see that David did not get up and go from Baale, but that he went to there. For if the author of 2 Samuel were concerned to at least indicate the place from which David carried off the ark, then to speak proper Hebrew he would have said: and David arose, and set out etc. from Baale-judah, and from there he carried off the ark of God.

63. Here the judgment of modern scholarship would seem to be that Spinoza is right to think the Masoretic text corrupt, but wrong in his conjecture about how the text should read. Cf. Anchor Samuel, II, 162–63.

64. \*\*[ADN. XX] Those who have been involved in commenting on this text have corrected it in the following way: and Absalom fled, and went to Talmai, the son of Ammibud, king of Gesbur, where he stayed for three years, and David mourned his son all the time he was at Gesbur. But if that's what they call interpretation, and if we're permitted to give ourselves such license in the explanation of Scripture, and to transpose in that way whole phrases, either by joining them or by cutting something out, I acknowledge that we are permitted to corrupt Scripture, and to give it as many different forms as we like, as if it were a piece of wax. [Spinoza's judgment that the received text is corrupt is evidently correct, though the comment in the annotation may be unduly harsh. See Anchor Samuel, II, 332.]

65. Printed Hebrew Bibles typically contain more than a thousand marginal notes reflecting differences between the consonantal text and the version of the text read in services. The latter is known as the *qere* (what is to be read), whereas the text is known as the *kethib* (what is written). Sometimes these notes seem clearly intended to correct textual errors; in other cases, they clearly give variant readings. Sometimes their purpose is not clear. See NJPS, p. xii, n. 5. ALM note that the danger of confusing similar letters was a common theme among Hebraists in this period.

very often inaudible, so that one is indiscriminately taken for the other.

- 25 E.g., in Leviticus 25:30 it is written, וְקָם הַבַּיִת אֲשֶׁר בְּעִיר אֲשֶׁר לֹא חוֹמָה, *and the house which is in a city which has no wall will be made secure*, but in the margin there is אֲשֶׁר לוֹ חוֹמָה, *which has a wall*.

[39] These things are clear enough in themselves, but [I mention them because] I want to reply to the arguments of certain Pharisees, who try to persuade us that the Writers of the Sacred books themselves  
30 attached the marginal notes, or gave indications for them, in order to signify some mystery. The first of these arguments, which doesn't much move me, they take from the practice of reading the Scriptures. They ask: if these notes were attached because of variant readings, which later generations could not decide between, why has the practice prevailed of always retaining the meaning of the marginal note?<sup>66</sup> Why, they ask,  
[III/137] did [the later generations] note the meaning they wanted to retain in the margin? They ought to have written the books themselves as they wanted them to be read, instead of relegating to the margin the meaning and reading they most approved.

- [40] Their second argument, drawn from the nature of the thing  
5 itself, seems to have an air of plausibility. Suppose the errors are not intentional, but have crept into the Manuscripts by chance. What happens by chance, happens now one way, now another. But in the Pentateuch, with only one exception, the word בַּעֲרָה, *girl*, is always written defectively, contrary to the rule of grammar, without the letter ה, *he*, whereas in the margin it is written correctly, according to the universal  
10 rule of grammar.<sup>67</sup> Has this, too, happened because someone's hand erred in copying? By what fate could it have happened that the pen always acted too quickly whenever this word occurred? Again, [the scribes of the later generations] could easily, without any misgivings, have made good this defect, and corrected it according to the rules of grammar.  
[41] Therefore, since these readings did not happen by chance, and  
15 they did not correct defects so clear, [the Pharisees] conclude from this that the first Writers made these [errors] according to a definite plan, to signify something by them.

We can easily reply to these arguments. I see little merit in [the Pharisees'] arguing from the practice which has prevailed among [the later generations]. [42] I don't know what superstition could have per-  
20 suaded them to do. Perhaps they did these things because they regarded

66. So the NJPS edition normally bases its translation on the *qere*, noting that although the *qere* was preserved only in the margin, the Masoretes gave it greater weight than the *kethib*. The quotation from Judges 21 at the end of §37 is an instance of this.

67. The omission of the final consonant changes the meaning of the word from *young woman* to *young man*.

each reading as equally good *or* acceptable, and therefore, in order that neither of them should be neglected, wanted one to be written and the other to be read. In so great a matter, they were afraid to determine their judgment, lest in their uncertainty they choose the false [reading] in place of the true one. So they did not want to prefer either one to the other, as they would have done, without qualification, if they had commanded only one reading to be both written and read, especially  
 25 since the marginal notes are not written in the Sacred books.<sup>68</sup> [43] Or perhaps it happened because, although certain things were copied correctly, they still wanted them to be read differently, as they had noted them in the margin. Therefore, they established the general practice of reading the Bible according to the marginal notes.

[44] But now I shall say what cause moved the Scribes to note certain  
 30 things explicitly in the margin as to be read. Not all the marginal notes are doubtful readings, but [the Scribes] also noted readings which were alien to their usage, viz. obsolete words and those which the customs of their time did not permit to be read in a public assembly. [45] For the ancient Writers, without evil intent, used to indicate things by their proper names, without any courtly euphemisms. But after wicked conduct and extravagant living became prevalent, things which the ancients  
 [III/138] said without obscenity began to be considered obscene. There was no need to change Scripture itself for this reason. Nevertheless, out of consideration for the weakness of ordinary people, they introduced the custom of using more respectable terms for intercourse and excrement when the works were read in public; and they indicated these terms  
 5 in the marginal notes.

[46] Finally, whatever the reason why it became customary to read and interpret the Scriptures according to the marginal readings, at least it was not that the true interpretation must be found only there. For not only do the Rabbis in the Talmud often depart from the Masoretes  
 10 and have other readings which they approve, as I shall soon show, other things are found in the margin which seem less sanctioned by linguistic usage. [47] E.g., in 2 Samuel 14:22 is written אשר עשה המלך את עבדו דבר, *because the King has acted according to the advice of his servant*, a construction which is entirely regular and agrees with that in v. 15 of  
 15 the same chapter. But what is in the margin (עבדך, *of thy servant*) does not agree with the person of the verb. [48] Similarly, in 2 Samuel 16:23 is written כאשר ישאל בדבר האלהים, *and when (one) consults the word of God*

68. In the unpointed scrolls read in the Synagogues, although the *kethib* is retained in the text, the *qere* is not given in the margin. The reader is expected to know when to read the *qere* instead of the *kethib*.

(i.e., when it is consulted). In the margin איש, *someone*, is added as the subject of the verb. But this does not seem to have been done accurately enough, for the ordinary usage of this language is to use impersonal  
 20 verbs in the third person singular of the active verb, as Grammarians know very well. In this way we find many notes which simply can't be preferred to what is written.

[49] As for the Pharisees' second argument, what we've just said enables us to respond to it easily too. In addition to doubtful readings,  
 25 the Scribes also noted obsolete words. For there's no doubt that in the Hebrew language, as in every other, subsequent usage made many things obsolete and antiquated, that the last Scribes found such things in the Bible,<sup>69</sup> and that, as we've said, they noted all of them, so that when the texts were read in public they would be read according to  
 30 the usage accepted at that time. [50] That's why the word נער, *na'ar*, is found everywhere with a marginal note; in antiquity it was of common gender, and meant the same thing *juvenis* does in Latin [i.e., a young person of either sex]. Similarly, the ancients pronounced the capital city of the Hebrews ירושלים, *yerushalem*, not ירושלים, *yerushalayim*. I think the same concerning the pronoun, הוא, [which can mean either] *he* [or] *she*; the later Hebrews changed the ו to a י (a frequent change in the  
 [III/139] Hebrew language) when they wanted to signify the feminine gender; but the ancients were accustomed to distinguish the feminine from the masculine of this pronoun only by vowels [which were not, at that time, a part of the written language]. [51] Moreover, the irregularity of certain verbs was also different at different times. And finally, the  
 5 ancients used the paragogic letters, האמתי, with a refinement peculiar to their own times. I could illustrate all these things here with many examples, but I do not want to detain the reader in tedious material.

[52] If you ask, "how do you know these things?" I reply: because I've found them frequently among the most ancient Biblical Writers, and yet saw that later writers did not want to imitate them. This is the  
 10 only way words can be known to be obsolete in the other languages, even in languages now dead.

[53] But perhaps someone will still insist: [i] since I've maintained that most of these notes are doubtful readings, why don't we ever find more than two readings of the same passage? why not sometimes three, or more? Again, [ii] certain things in the Written texts (which are

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69. Although it is difficult to date the earliest parts of the Hebrew Bible, there is apparently a consensus that they go back at least to some time in the tenth century B.C.E., and possibly considerably earlier. The latest parts can be more confidently dated to the early second century B.C.E. (see Kugel 2007, 5). This offers considerable scope for linguistic change.

15 indicated correctly in the margin) are so clearly contrary to Grammar that it's just not credible that the scribes could have been in difficulty about them and doubted which was the true reading.

[54] To these objections, too, it's easy to reply. To the first, [i] I say that there *were* more readings than we find noted in our manuscripts.  
 20 For the Talmud notes many which the Masoretes neglected. The authors of the Talmud depart from the Masoretes so openly in many places that that superstitious<sup>70</sup> corrector of the Bomberg Bible<sup>71</sup> was finally compelled to confess in his preface that he doesn't know how to reconcile them, ולא ידענא לתרוצי אלא כדתרצינא לעיל דארחיה דגמרא לפלוגי על המסורת, *we*  
 25 *don't know how to reply here, except as we've done above, that the practice of the Talmud is to contradict the Masoretes*. So we can have no adequate foundation for maintaining that there were never more than two readings of one passage.

[55] Nevertheless, I grant readily—indeed, I believe—that not more than two readings of one passage have ever been found. And that for  
 30 two reasons. First, because the cause we've shown for the variety of readings which exist cannot allow more than two. We've shown that they've come mainly from the similarity of certain letters. [56] So the doubt almost always came back in the end to this: which of two letters (whose use is very frequent) ought to have been written, *beth*, ב, or *kaph*, כ, *yod*, י, or *waw*, ו, *daleth*, ד, or *resh*, ר, etc.? So it could often  
 [III/140] happen that either one would yield a tolerable meaning. Again, [in some cases the doubt might arise from the question] whether a syllable was long or short, where the length of the syllable is determined by [the presence or absence of] the Quiescent letters. Moreover, not all of the notes are doubtful readings. For we've said that many notes  
 5 were inserted for the sake of decency, or to explain obsolete and antiquated words.

70. Latin: *superstitiosus*, which can, of course, mean superstitious, but may also mean nothing more than a blind adherence to rules.

71. Daniel Bomberg, one of the earliest printers of Hebrew-language books, published the first Rabbinic Bible (*Mikra'ot Gedolot*), consisting of the Hebrew text with Targums and the standard commentaries (including those of Rashi and Ibn Ezra) in 4 volumes, in 1517–18. Spinoza's *superstitiosus corrector* was R. Jacob ben Hayyim, who edited the second edition of the Bomberg Bible, which appeared in 1524–25. According to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, R. Jacob believed in the importance of the masorah as the guarantor of the correct text, and “went to great pains . . . to secure as many codices with a masorah as possible.” But as he discovered that “the masorah did not harmonize with the majority of the codices,” he had to exercise his discretion. Later Bibles in the sixteenth century tend to follow his text. The Bible on which Spinoza primarily relied was the four-volume rabbinic Bible published by Buxtorf in 1618. The Bibles produced by Buxtorf were modeled on the Bomberg Bible, but were influenced by Sephardic, rather than Ashkenazic, traditions.

[57] The second reason I'm persuaded that not more than two readings of one passage are found is that I believe the Scribes found very few copies, perhaps not more than two or three. The treatise of the Scribes, סופרים,<sup>72</sup> ch. 6, mentions only three, which they hypothesize  
 10 were found in the time of Ezra, because they claim that these notes were inserted by Ezra himself. [58] However that may be, if they had three, we can easily conceive that in a given passage two of them always agreed. Indeed, it would've been marvelous if, with only three copies, they found three different readings of one and the same passage.

15 By what fate did it happen that after Ezra there were so few copies? If you read 1 Maccabees 1[:54–61] or Josephus' *Antiquities* XII, v, you won't wonder any longer.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, it will seem marvelous that after such extensive and enduring persecution they were able to retain those few. I  
 20 think no one who has read that account with even moderate attention has any doubt about this.

[59] So we see why there aren't more than two doubtful readings anywhere. The fact that there are never more than two readings is no reason to infer that in the annotated passages the Bible was deliberately written incorrectly to signify some mystery.

25 [60] [ii] As for the second objection [§53] – that certain things are written so incorrectly that they couldn't have doubted their being contrary to correct usage in every period, and ought to have just corrected them, without noting them in the margin – this doesn't concern me. I'm not bound to know what religious scruple moved them not to  
 30 do this. [61] Perhaps they did it out of integrity, because they wanted to hand the Bible down to posterity in whatever way they themselves had found it in a few originals, and to note the discrepancies between the originals, not, indeed, as doubtful readings, but as variants. I have called them doubtful only because in almost every case I have no idea which is to be preferred to the other.

[62] Finally, in addition to these doubtful readings, the Scribes also  
 [III/141] noted a number of mutilated passages by inserting an empty space in the middle of a paragraph. The Masoretes pass on twenty-eight of these passages where an empty space is inserted in the middle of a paragraph. I don't know whether they also believe that some mystery lies hidden

72. Spinoza is referring to an extra-canonical treatise, added at the end of the order *Nezikin* in the Babylonian Talmud. In ch. 6, §4 we read: "R. Simeon ben Lakish says they discovered three books in the Temple." He tells how they compared their texts, and in each case preferred the reading given by two manuscripts over that given by only one (ALM).

73. The texts cited describe the attempt of Antiochus in the second century B.C.E. to destroy Judaism by having copies of the Bible burned and those found possessing them killed.



5 in that number. Moreover, the Pharisees scrupulously keep to a certain quantity of space [in indicating these lacunae]. [63] There is an example of this—to mention one—in Genesis 4:8, where it is written: *and Cain said to Abel, his brother; . . . and it happened, while they were in the field, that Cain etc.*<sup>1</sup> An empty space is left where we were expecting to learn  
 10 what Cain said to his brother. Besides the things already noted, there are twenty-eight passages of this kind, left untouched by the Scribes. Many of these, however, wouldn't appear mutilated if there weren't a space inserted. But that's enough on these matters.

[III/141]

## CHAPTER X

*The Remaining Books of the Old Testament  
 Examined in the same way as above*

[1] I pass to the remaining books of the Old Testament. About the two books of Chronicles I have nothing certain and worth noting, except that they were written long after Ezra,<sup>2</sup> and perhaps after Judas Maccabee  
 20 restored the temple.<sup>3\*\*</sup> For in 1 Chronicles 9 the Historian relates *which*

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1. Modern editions vary in their treatment of this case, sometimes indicating the omission in the Masoretic text with an ellipsis and a note (as in the NJPS translation), sometimes inserting the missing words in brackets, from the Septuagint (as in HCSB). What Cain said to Abel was “Let us go out to the field.” In this case the lacuna would be quite obvious even without the empty space.

2. Talmudic tradition made Ezra the author of the genealogies of 1 Chronicles “up to his own time” and attributed the rest of Chronicles to Nehemiah. See Baba Bathra 15a. Ezra 7:1–7 identifies Ezra as a scholarly priest, contemporary with Artaxerxes (probably Artaxerxes I, who reigned from 465 to 424), who went up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes’ reign. Nehemiah was a Jewish official in the service of Artaxerxes, charged in 445 with rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. Spinoza mistakenly thinks Ezra and Nehemiah were sixth-century figures. See below, n. 3, and ADN. XXIV at x, 27.

3. \*\*[ADN. XXI] This suspicion—if what is certain can, indeed, be called a suspicion—is inferred from the Genealogy of King Jeconiah, which is given in 1 Chronicles 3 from vs. 17, and carried on as far as the sons of Elieoenai, who were thirteenth in line from him. It should be noted that when Jeconiah was put in prison, he did not have children, but seems to have fathered children in prison, insofar as we may conjecture from the names he gave them. As for grandchildren, as far as we may again conjecture from their names, he seems to have had them after he was freed from prison. So *Pedaiah* (which means *God has freed*), who is said in this chapter to have been [Saint-Glaine: the father of Zerubbabel, was born] in the 37th or 38th year of Jeconiah’s captivity, i.e., thirty-three years before Cyrus ended the Babylonian Captivity. Zerubbabel, whom Cyrus put in charge of the Jews, seems thus to have been thirteen or fourteen at most.

But I have preferred to pass over these things in silence, for reasons which the oppressiveness of our times does not permit me to explain. For the wise a hint is enough.

*families first* (i.e., in the time of Ezra) *lived in Jerusalem*.<sup>4</sup> And again in 1 Chronicles 9:17 he gives information about the *gatekeepers*, two of

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Anyone who is willing to carefully review the account of all of Jeconiah's descendants in 1 Chronicles 3:17–24, and to compare the Hebrew text with the Septuagint version, will be able to see without difficulty that these books were published after the second restoration of the city by Judas Maccabee, at a time when the descendants of Jeconiah had lost the rule, not before.

[At the beginning of the last paragraph Marchand's version of this note has: "reasons which the injustices and reigning superstition oppressiveness of our times . . ."]

Jeconiah (aka Jehoiachin) was the king of Judah who was taken into captivity in Babylon in 597 BCE, and kept under house arrest until he was released by King Evil-merodach thirty-seven years later (see 2 Kings 24:8–12, 25:27–30). Spinoza evidently inferred from Pedaiah's name that he was born around the time of Jeconiah's release, and assumed that Pedaiah would not have fathered Zerubbabel before he was around twenty. Spinoza's calculations assume that the captivity lasted seventy years. (This was based on a tradition going back to Jer. 25:11–12.) Modern research indicates that the captivity was somewhat shorter than that, lasting from 597 to 538.

Spinoza arrived at the count of thirteen generations from Jeconiah to the sons of Elioenai by following the Septuagint translation, which renders verse 21 differently than the Masoretic text. The latter yields only nine generations from Jeconiah to the sons of Elioenai, not thirteen. (Recent English translations—the NRSV and NJPS—also follow the Septuagint.)

There are still puzzles about this note. Why is Spinoza so certain in the note that the books of Chronicles were written after the Maccabean restoration of the temple (i.e., after 164 BCE)? Modern scholars put the date of Chronicles much earlier than that (though not so early as to permit Ezra to have been the author). Anchor Chronicles, I, 101–17, argues for a date in the late fourth or early third century (though it allows that Chron. 3:17–24 may be a late addition to an earlier text).

The solution here seems to be that Spinoza is assuming, not only that twelve generations passed after Jeconiah went into captivity, but also that on average the gap between generations was in excess of thirty-five years. There is precedent for this. Some biblical scholars have assumed as many as forty years per generation. Modern scholars favor an average of twenty-five or even twenty years. (On this see Anchor Chronicles, I, 329–30.)

More difficult is the question why Spinoza thinks the oppressiveness (or injustices and superstition) of his times will not permit him to do more than hint at conclusions he passes over in silence. ALM (followed by Totaro) suggest that perhaps the problem is that the genealogy in Chronicles is inconsistent with that given in Matt. 1:12–16. But reaching this conclusion would not require comparison of the Masoretic text with the Septuagint. The differences between the Masoretic genealogy and that in Matthew are obvious enough. (So for that matter, are the differences between the genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3.) Perhaps more relevant is the fact that Matt. 1:17 claims that only fourteen generations passed between Jeconiah and the Messiah. This would make one of the sons of Elioenai, and not Joseph, the father figure in the household in which Jesus grew up.]

4. Spinoza quotes 1 Chron. 9:2–3, with some omissions. Why does he place Ezra in the time of the first return from Babylon? Partly, it seems, because Ezra is listed at Neh. 12:1 as among those who returned with Zerubbabel. Cf. ADN. XXIV at x, 27. And partly also, it seems, because he took Ezra 7:1 to indicate that the events described in that and succeeding chapters of Ezra happened soon after the sixth-century events described in preceding chapters. (Suggested by Gary Knoppers in personal communication.) Apparently there was confusion in the rabbinic tradition about the chronology of the Persian kings. (Certainly there is confusion about this in Josephus, *Antiquities* XI, v.)

whom are also mentioned in Nehemiah 11:19. This shows that these books were written long after the rebuilding of the city.<sup>5</sup>

- 25 [2] However that may be, nothing is apparent to me about the true Writer of these books, nor about their authority, utility and teaching. Indeed, I cannot sufficiently wonder that they have been accepted as Sacred by the people who removed the book of wisdom, Tobias, and the rest of the so-called apocrypha from the canon of the sacred books.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, it is not my intent to lessen their authority; since everyone  
30 has accepted them, I too leave them as they are.

[3] The Psalms were also collected, and divided up into five books, in the time of the second temple.<sup>7</sup> For according to the testimony of Philo Judaeus, Psalm 88 was edited while King Jehoiakin was still kept  
[III/142] in captivity in Babylon, and Psalm 89 when the same King obtained his freedom. I don't believe Philo would ever have said this unless either it was the received opinion in his time or he had accepted it from others worthy of trust.<sup>8</sup>

- [4] I believe the Proverbs of Solomon were also collected at the same time, or at the earliest, in the time of King Josiah, because the  
5 last verse of ch. 24 says, *These also are the Proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transcribed.*<sup>9</sup> [5] But here I cannot

5. Huet complained in his *Demonstratio* (207) that it was not clear why Spinoza thought these passages supported his conclusion. Droetto/Giancotti suggest that ADN. XXI is intended to reply in advance to such critics.

6. Cf. ix, 28, where Spinoza comments on the discrepancies between the narratives in Kings and those in Chronicles. The book of wisdom he refers to is the work now known as "The Wisdom of Solomon." Cf. also xviii, 16, where Spinoza expresses skepticism about the Chronicler's account of a battle.

7. The Talmud ascribed primary authorship of the Psalms to David—though it credited him with also collecting the work of earlier authors, going back as far as Adam, Abraham and Moses (Baba Bathra 14b). Augustine at one time argued that David was the author of all 150 psalms, explaining those which, like 137, seemed to date from a later time as having been written through the gift of prophecy (*City of God* XVII, xiv). Spinoza's conclusion here focuses on the final editing and would be generally accepted now (cf. Kugel 2007, ch. 26). Even in Spinoza's own day Huet seems to accept that some of the Psalms date from the post-exilic period (*Demonstratio*, 226–28).

8. Spinoza refers here to the work he will cite in x, 26, under the title *The Book of Times*. This is not, as he seems to think, a genuine work of Philo's, but a forgery by a fifth-century Dominican monk, Annius of Viterbo. For details, see ALM. It's odd that Spinoza should appeal here to the authority of Philo and the consensus in his time, when he generally attaches little weight to authority or consensus. This seems particularly surprising, since he had better and more characteristic arguments available to him, as the preceding note may suggest.

9. In English translations the verse quoted is Prov. 25:1. The text also ascribes its proverbs to Solomon in 1:1 and 10:1. Huet greeted these ascriptions with glee. At last we find a biblical book which says who its author was (*Demonstratio*, 234). Modern scholars regard these passages as later editorial additions, and date the earliest of the proverbs to the period of the divided monarchy, with the final stages of composition and editing occurring in the late Persian or Hellenistic period (HCSB 849). Although tradition is

pass over in silence the boldness of the Rabbis, who wanted this book, along with Ecclesiastes, excluded from the canon of Sacred books, and wanted to keep it under guard, along with other books we are now lacking.<sup>10</sup> They would simply have done this, if they had not found  
 10 certain passages which commended the law of Moses. It is surely a cause of grief that sacred and noble matters depended on the choice of these men. All the same, I thank them for having been willing to share these books too with us—though I cannot help doubting whether they have handed them down in good faith.<sup>11</sup> But I don't want to subject this to a strict examination here.

15 [6] So I proceed to the books of the Prophets.<sup>12</sup> When I pay close attention to these books, I see that the Prophecies in them have been collected from other books, and that they aren't always written down in the same order in which the Prophets themselves spoke or wrote them. Moreover, they don't even contain all the [Prophecies], but only those [the editors] were able to find here and there. So these books are only the fragments of the Prophets.

20 [7] For Isaiah began to prophesy in the reign of Uzziah, as the transcriber himself tells us in the first verse. But he not only prophesied at that time, he also recorded all the deeds of this King (see 2 Chronicles 26:22). This book is now lost. What we have, we have shown to have been copied out from the Chronicles of the Kings of  
 25 Judah and of Israel.<sup>13</sup> [8] Add to this that the Rabbis maintain that this Prophet prophesied also in the reign of Manasseh, by whom, in the end, he was killed. And although they seem to be relating a legend, still they seem to have believed that not all of his Prophecies were extant.<sup>14</sup>

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often said to have ascribed Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon to Solomon, the Talmud ascribes all three works to "Hezekiah and his colleagues," that is, to the late eighth or early seventh century (Baba Bathra 15a). Manasseh ascribed them to Solomon.

10. For more on the process of canon selection, see below, §§43–47. On the controversy over the canonicity of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, see Leiman 1976, 72–86. It was objected against both works that their words were self-contradictory, and against Ecclesiastes that its teaching was heretical. One objection to its orthodoxy was that some of its passages seem to deny the immortality of the soul. Cf. Manasseh (1842/1972, II, 312–15) on the *prima facie* conflict between Eccles. 3:19 and 12:7.

11. The conclusion of Ecclesiastes in particular (12:9–14) is widely thought to be a later interpolation. See Seow 1997, 391–96.

12. Spinoza has already discussed six books which the Jewish tradition counted as books of prophecy: the sequence from Joshua through 2 Kings. Spinoza's classification reflects his view that these works are more properly classed with the five books of Moses, as part of an extended historical narrative. Cf. viii, 42.

13. See above, ix, 4.

14. For the tradition of Isaiah's murder by Manasseh, see the Talmud, Yebamoth 49b, Sanhedrin 103b.

[9] Second, the Prophecies of Jeremiah, which are narrated in an historical manner, have been gathered and assembled from various  
 30 chroniclers. For not only are they piled up confusedly, without attention to chronological order, but the same story is repeated in different ways. Ch. 21 explains the reason for Jeremiah's imprisonment: when Zedekiah consulted him, he predicted the destruction of the city. Ch. 22 interrupts this story to relate his declamation against Jehoiakin,  
 [III/143] who reigned before Zedekiah,<sup>15</sup> and his prediction of the King's captivity. Then ch. 25 describes things revealed to the Prophet before these, in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim [Jehoiakin's father and predecessor as king]. [In ch. 26] we find things which happened in the first year of this King. [10] And so, without any chronological  
 5 order, [the editor] proceeds to pile up Prophecies, until finally ch. 38 returns to what ch. 21 began to narrate, as if these fifteen chapters were spoken parenthetically.<sup>16</sup> For the conjunction with which ch. 38 begins<sup>17</sup> is related to 21:8–10. And then it describes very differently the final imprisonment of Jeremiah and gives a very different reason for his long detention in the guard's court than the reason narrated in  
 10 ch. 37. You can see clearly that all these [passages] are collected from different Historians, and that [their disorder] cannot be excused by any other reason.

[11] As for the rest of the Prophecies, contained in the remaining chapters, where Jeremiah speaks in the first person, they seem to have been copied out from the scroll Baruch wrote at Jeremiah's own dicta-  
 15 tion. For it's apparent from Jeremiah 36:2 that that scroll contained only the things revealed to this Prophet from Josiah's time down to the fourth year of Jehoiakim, when this book begins. The materials from 45:2 to 51:59 also seem to have been copied out from that scroll.

20 [12] The first verses of Ezekiel indicate very clearly that it too is only a fragment. Who does not see that the conjunction the book begins with<sup>18</sup> is related to other things already said, and connects them with the things to follow? But it's not only the conjunction; the whole

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The annotation of Baba Bathra 15a, explaining why the Talmud ascribes the book of Isaiah to Hezekiah and his colleagues, reports that "according to Rashi, Isaiah was executed by Manasseh before he could reduce his own prophecies to writing."

15. Jehoiachin reigned briefly, in the winter of 598–597, after which he was taken into exile in Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar placed his uncle, Zedekiah, on the throne. He reigned for ten years.

16. It would seem that sixteen chapters intervened between Jer. 21 and Jer. 38.

17. A literal translation of the first phrase in Jer. 38 would read: "*And* he [Shephatiah] heard" (my emphasis). Modern translations often do not make explicit this connection to preceding material.

18. A literal translation of the first phrase in Ezek. 1 would read: "*And* it was" or "*And* it came to pass."

context of the statement presupposes other previous writings. [13] For this book begins with a reference to the thirtieth year,<sup>19</sup> which shows  
 25 that the Prophet is continuing his narration, not beginning it. The Writer himself also notes this when he adds parenthetically in v. 3, *the word of God often came to Ezekiel, the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans*, etc., as if to say that the words of Ezekiel which he had recorded up to that point were related to other things, which had been revealed to him before this thirtieth year. Further, in his *Antiqui-*  
 30 *ties* (X, vii, [2]) Josephus relates that Ezekiel predicted that Zedekiah would not see Babylon, which we do not read in our book—i.e., the book we have.<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, one reads there (in 17:[16–21]) that he would be led as a captive to Babylon.<sup>21\*\*</sup>

[14] Concerning Hosea we cannot say with certainty that he wrote more things than are contained in the book attributed to him. Still, I am amazed that we do not have more writings of his, since the Writer  
 [III/144] testifies that he prophesied more than 84 years.<sup>22</sup>

19. Probably a reference to Ezekiel's age when he had the vision described in the first chapter (HCSB).

20. In the passage cited from the *Antiquities*, Josephus is concerned about an apparent contradiction between prophecies in Jeremiah (in 32:2–5 and 34:2–5, which say that the king of Babylon will take Zedekiah in captivity to Babylon) and the prophecy in Ezekiel (12:8–13, which says that Zedekiah will be taken in captivity to Babylon, but will not see that city). According to Josephus, Zedekiah took the fact that these prophecies seemed to conflict in one respect as a reason to disbelieve the prophets altogether, even on the matters where they agreed. Later (in X, viii, 2) Josephus points out that the prophecies were not inconsistent: Nebuchadnezzar did capture Zedekiah and take him to Babylon; but he blinded him first. So though Zedekiah was taken to Babylon as a captive, he never saw the city where he was imprisoned (2 Kings 25:7, Jer. 39:7).

Consistently with his contention that our present book of Ezekiel is only a fragment of the prophet's writings, Spinoza seems to hypothesize here that Josephus may have had a different (presumably fuller) text of Ezekiel than we do, since he does not find in Ezekiel a prophecy that Zedekiah would not see Babylon, but only the prophecy of 17:16–21, which just says that Zedekiah will be taken as a captive to Babylon.

Spinoza's hypothesis that Josephus may have had a different text of Ezekiel does not seem necessary to explain why he might have been concerned to remove the apparent contradiction. Josephus does not identify the passages in Jeremiah and Ezekiel which are in *prima facie* conflict. Apparently when Spinoza looked for a passage in Ezekiel which predicted Zedekiah's future, he found 17:16–21 (which does not say Zedekiah will not see Babylon), but missed 12:13 (which does).

21. \*\*[ADN. XXII] And so no one could have suspected that [Ezekiel's] prophecy contradicted Jeremiah's prediction—as everyone did from Josephus' account (until they knew from the outcome of the affair that both [prophets] predicted the truth).

22. It's not clear how Spinoza arrives at 84 years as the minimum length of Hosea's prophetic career. But that his career must have lasted for at least several decades does seem to be a fair inference from Hosea 1:1, where the editor declares that Hosea prophesied in the reigns of four kings of Judah, the earliest of whom, Uzziah (or Azariah), is now thought to have reigned c. 783–742 B.C.E. and the last of whom, Hezekiah, is thought to have reigned c. 715–687/6 B.C.E. For the reigns of these kings, see 2 Kings 15–18 and the annotation of those chapters in HCSB.

[15] We can, at least, know this in general: that the Writers of these books did not collect all the prophecies of all the Prophets, nor even all the prophecies of the Prophets we have. For of the Prophets who prophesied during the reign of Manasseh (mentioned generally in 2  
 5 Chronicles 33:10, 18 and 19), we have no prophecies at all. Nor do we have all the prophecies of these twelve Prophets.<sup>23</sup> For of Jonah's Prophecies, only those about the Ninevites are recorded, though he also prophesied to the Israelites (see 2 Kings 14:25).

10 [16] Concerning the book of Job, and Job himself, there has been much controversy among the Writers.<sup>24</sup> Some people think Moses wrote this book, and that the whole story is only a parable. Some of the Rabbis in the Talmud hand down this view; Maimonides too leans toward it in his *Moreh Nevuchim*. Others have believed the story to be  
 15 true. Of these, some thought that this Job lived in the time of Jacob, and that he married Jacob's daughter, Dinah. [17] But as I've already said [vii, 64], Ibn Ezra asserts in his commentaries on this book that it was translated into Hebrew from another language.

I wish he had shown us this more clearly. If he had, we could infer  
 20 that the gentiles too had sacred books. [But since he didn't,] I leave the matter in doubt. Nevertheless, I do conjecture that Job was a gentile<sup>25</sup> whose heart was very constant, and whose affairs at first prospered, then went very badly, and finally were very fortunate. For Ezekiel 14:14 names him among others [as a righteous man]. [18] And I believe that the changes in Job's fortunes, and the constancy of his heart, gave many  
 25 people an occasion for arguing about God's providence—or at least gave the author of this book an occasion to compose this Dialogue. For the things in it, as well as the style, seem to be, not those of a man suffering among the ashes, but those of a man reflecting at leisure in his study.<sup>26</sup> And here I would believe, along with Ibn Ezra, that this book really was translated from another language, because [the author] seems  
 30 to aspire to the poetic art of the Gentiles. For twice the Father of the Gods calls a council, and Momus (here called Satan) criticizes God's dictates with the greatest freedom, etc. But these are only conjectures, and are not sufficiently firm.

23. The twelve "minor" prophets, whose writings were so short that originally they were all contained on one scroll. This series of prophets, beginning with Hosea and ending with Malachi, concludes the section of the Hebrew Bible devoted to the prophets.

24. For the Talmud, see Baba Bathra 14b–16b; for Maimonides, see his *Guide* III, 22. Spinoza mentioned the controversy over Job's historicity earlier, in ii, 55. For a modern discussion of issues about the dating of Job, see Pope's introduction to *Anchor Job*.

25. Kugel discusses reasons for holding that Job was a gentile in Kugel 2007, ch. 34.

26. Spinoza's comment on the style of Job echoes Hobbes' observation in *Leviathan* xxxiii, 12.



[19] I pass to the book of Daniel. From ch. 8 on, this book no doubt contains Daniel's own writings. But where the first seven chapters were [III/145] copied from, I don't know. Except for the first, they were written in Chaldean.<sup>27</sup> So we can suspect that they were taken from the Chronicles of the Chaldeans. [20] If this were clearly established, it would be most splendid evidence to persuade us that Scripture is sacred only insofar as by Scripture we mean the things signified in Scripture, not insofar as we

5 mean by Scripture the words, *or* the language and utterances, by which things are signified. It would show, further, that the books teaching and relating excellent things are equally sacred, whatever language they were finally written in, and whatever nation wrote them. [21] Nevertheless, we can at least note this: these chapters were written in Chaldean and, notwithstanding that, are as sacred as the rest of the Bible.

10 The first book of Ezra<sup>28</sup> is so connected to this book of Daniel that it is easy to see that the Writer is the same person, who is continuing to relate the affairs of the Jews in sequence, from the first part of the captivity.<sup>29</sup>

[22] And I don't doubt that the Book of Esther is connected with the first book of Ezra. For the conjunction with which this book begins<sup>30</sup> can't be related to any other book. Furthermore, it is not credible that

15 Esther is the book Mordecai wrote.<sup>31</sup> For in 9:20–22 another person relates, concerning Mordecai, that he wrote Letters, and what they contained. Moreover, in 9:31[–32], [the narrator relates] that queen

27. "Chaldean" is one of the terms Spinoza uses to refer to the language now generally referred to as Aramaic, which is the language used in Daniel from 2:4b to the end of ch. 7. The rest of Daniel is in Hebrew. Cf. viii, 25–26. Spinoza also refers to Aramaic as Syriac in ADN. XXVI (at xi, 3).

28. I.e., the book now known simply as Ezra. The book now usually called Nehemiah was called 2 Ezra in the Latin Vulgate. The prevailing view among modern scholars is that the Ezra-Nehemiah sequence was written as a continuation of 1 and 2 Chronicles, by an author whose style and interests were very similar to those of the author of Chronicles (though he was not the author of Chronicles). Both authors are thought to have been Jerusalem clergy of the fourth century BCE (HCSB, 646). Although much of the material in the first six chapters of Daniel is also thought to come from the fourth century, some portions of the last six chapters are now dated to the early second century (HCSB, 1168).

29. Daniel begins by relating events supposed to have happened to young Jewish members of the royal family and nobility during the first years of the Babylonian captivity (c. 597–590). Later chapters pass to events supposed to have happened during the reign of Darius I (or Darius the Great, 522–486), the Persian emperor said in Ezra 6 to have authorized the rebuilding of the temple (c. 520). Ezra begins by describing the return of the exiles to Jerusalem (c. 538) and concludes with Artaxerxes commissioning Ezra to establish pentateuchal law as state law in Judea. The Artaxerxes in question is apparently Artaxerxes I, who reigned from 465 to 424. Like Daniel, Ezra also contains a substantial portion written in Aramaic.

30. A literal translation of the first phrase of Esther would read: "*And* it was" or: "*And* it came to pass."

31. As Rashi (1960) held, on the basis of Esther 9:20.

Esther established by edict matters pertaining to the festival of Lots (Purim), and that this was written in a book. It sounds in the Hebrew  
 20 as though this was a book known to everyone at that time—viz. the time in which the things [in the book of Esther] were written. And Ibn Ezra confesses, as everyone is bound to confess, that this [book] perished with the others. Finally, [in 10:2] the Historian sends us to the Chronicles of the Kings of Persia for the rest of Mordecai's story.

[23] There is thus no doubt that the same Historian who related the affairs of Daniel and Ezra also wrote this book, as well as the book of  
 25 Nehemiah<sup>32\*</sup> (called the second book of Ezra). So we maintain that one and the same Historian wrote these four books: Daniel, Ezra, Esther and Nehemiah. But who he was, I cannot even conjecture.

[24] How did this person, whoever he was, acquire knowledge of  
 30 these accounts, and perhaps also copy down most of them? Like the Kings in the first temple, the governors, *or* princes, of the Jews in the second temple had scribes *or* historiographers who wrote annals, *or* their Chronicles, in sequence. The Chronicles of the Kings, *or* their annals, are cited throughout the books of Kings. Those of the Princes  
 [III/146] and priests of the second temple are first cited in Nehemiah 12:23, and next in 1 Maccabees 16:24. [25] No doubt this is the book we just spoke about (see Esther 9:31[–32]), which gave accounts of Esther's edict and Mordecai's deeds, and which (with Ibn Ezra) we have said perished. It  
 5 seems, then, that all the things contained in these [four books] have been selected or copied out from this book. For the Writer of these books does not cite any other book, and we do not know any other book whose authority is generally recognized.

[26] That neither Ezra nor Nehemiah wrote these books is evident from the fact that Nehemiah 12:10–11 traces the descendants of the  
 10 high priest, Jeshua, down to Jaddua, the sixth high priest, who went out to meet Alexander the Great when he had nearly subjugated the Persian empire<sup>33\*</sup> (or as Philo Judaeus says in the book of times,<sup>34</sup> the sixth and last priest under the Persians). [27] Indeed, Nehemiah 12:22 indicates

32. \*\*[ADN. XXIII] The historian himself testifies in 1:1 that most of this book is taken from one Nehemiah himself wrote. But no doubt the historian, who lived after Nehemiah, added the things related from 8[:1]–12:26, as well as the last two verses of ch. 12, which are inserted parenthetically in the words of Nehemiah. [Nearly all of the first seven chapters of Nehemiah are written in the first person, and look as though they may have been taken from Nehemiah's own account of what he did. Most of the next six chapters are written in the third person, though there are two stretches of text (from 12:27–43 and from 13:4–31) where the editor seems to have inserted passages from Nehemiah's memoirs (HCSB, 647).]

33. \*See Josephus, *Antiquities* XI, viii. [A reference Spinoza gives in the text is here made a note.]

34. On this work, wrongly attributed to Philo, see above, n. 8 in x, 3.

this clearly: *In the time of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan and Jaddua*, says the Historian, *the Levites were recorded on*<sup>35\*</sup> *the reign of Darius the Persian*, i.e., in the Chronicles. I believe no one will think that either Ezra<sup>36\*\*</sup> or Nehemiah was so long-lived that they survived fourteen Kings of Persia. For Cyrus was the first to give the Jews permission to rebuild the temple, and from his time until that of Darius, the fourteenth and last of the Persian Kings, we count more than 230 years.<sup>37</sup>

[28] So I do not doubt that these books [Daniel, Ezra, Esther and Nehemiah] were written long after Judas Maccabee restored worship in the temple,<sup>38</sup> because at that time the false books of Daniel, Ezra and Esther<sup>39</sup> were circulated by certain malevolent people who no doubt belonged to the Sect of the Sadducees. For so far as I know, the Pharisees never accepted those books. And although we find in the book called 4 Ezra certain tales which we also read in the Talmud, that is still no reason to attribute them to the Pharisees. If you discount the most foolish of them, there is none of them who does not believe

35. \*Unless על [the word translated *on* in the text] means *beyond*, there has been a copyist's error, which has put על, *on*, in place of עד, *until*. [The use of the preposition על has puzzled other readers besides Spinoza. Albright suggested reading מעל, *from*, and Myers follows him. See Myers Ezra-Nehemiah, pp. 194–95, 198–99, and below, n. 36.]

36. \*\*[ADN. XXIV] Ezra was the uncle of the first high priest, Jeshua (see Ezra 7:1 and 1 Chronicles 6:13–15). Together with Zerubbabel he set out from Babylon to Jerusalem (see Nehemiah 12:1). But it seems that when he saw that the affairs of the Jews were in disarray, he returned to Babylon. Others also did this, as is evident from Nehemiah 1:2. He stayed there until the reign of Artaxerxes when, having obtained what he wanted, he set out for Jerusalem a second time. Nehemiah also left for Jerusalem with Zerubbabel in the time of Cyrus. See Ezra 2:2 and 63, and compare with Nehemiah 10:1 and 9. For the interpreters who render הטרשטא *batirshata* as *governor* do not prove this by any example, whereas it is certain that new names were given to the Jews who had to frequent the court. So Daniel was called Belteshazzar, Zerubbabel was called Sheshbazzar (see Daniel 1:7, Ezra 1:8 and 5:14), and Nehemiah was called Hatirshata. But by reason of his office he used to be called פחה, *administrator or governor*. See Nehemiah 5:14 and 12:26. [The Artaxerxes referred to in the fifth sentence is probably Artaxerxes I, who reigned from 465 to 424 B.C.E. Spinoza is apparently unclear about his dates, since he places Ezra and Nehemiah in the sixth century. There is much disagreement in the manuscripts about the scriptural references given in the seventh sentence. I follow Akkerman and Totaro.]

37. The Cyrus referred to here is Cyrus II (or Cyrus the Great), who reigned c. 550–530. Spinoza, following the chronology in Pereira's *Commentariorum in Danielem* (Gebhardt V, 71), takes “Darius the Persian” to be Darius III, who reigned from 336 to 330. On the Albright-Myers reading (mentioned above in n. 35), “Darius the Persian” will be Darius I, who reigned from 521 to 486. The reference to Jaddua, however, will still entail that (at least this passage in) Nehemiah was written no earlier than the time of Alexander. Though Totaro does not consider Albright's emendation, her annotation of this passage is still helpful.

38. For the modern view of the dating of these works, see above, n. 28, at x, 21.

39. Spinoza refers here to the additions to the books of Daniel and Esther, and to the book now most commonly known as 4 Ezra (a portion of 2 Esdras). For discussion of these works, see the section on Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books in HCSB.

30 that those legends were added by some trifler.<sup>40</sup> I also believe that some [Sadducees] did this to make the traditions [of the Pharisees] laughable to everyone. [29] Or if you prefer, perhaps [those books] were copied out and published at that time to show the people that the Prophecies of Daniel were fulfilled and in this way to strengthen them in religion, [III/147] so that in such great calamities they would not despair of having better times and of their future salvation.

[30] But though these books<sup>41</sup> are so much later and more recent, many errors have crept into them. If I'm not mistaken, this happened because they were copied out hastily. For in these books, as in the oth-  
5 ers, we find marginal notes of the kind we treated in the last Chapter, but more of them than in the others. Moreover, there are also certain passages which cannot be explained in any other way, as I shall shortly show.

First, though, I want to note this regarding the marginal readings of these books: even if we must grant the Pharisees that these readings go back to those who wrote the books themselves,<sup>42</sup> then we must say  
10 that the Writers (if, by chance, there was more than one) made a note of these readings because they found that the Chronicles they were transcribing were not written accurately enough, and that, though certain errors were clear, they still did not dare to correct the writings of the ancients and of their predecessors. There is no need now for me to treat these matters more fully here again.

[31] So I proceed to point out things not noted in the margin. First, I don't know how many errors have crept into Ezra 2. For in v. 64 the total of all those who have been numbered in the various families is given as 42,360. Nevertheless, if you add the subtotals for each family, you will not find more than 29,818. Something is wrong here, either  
20 in the total or in the subtotals.<sup>43</sup> But it seems we ought to believe that it is the overall total which is given correctly. No doubt everyone had an accurate recall of something so memorable, whereas the subtotals are not so memorable. If an error were to slip into the overall total, it would immediately be evident to everyone, and would easily be corrected.

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40. Gebhardt (V, 71) notes that although Manasseh ben Israel acknowledged that 4 Ezra was apocryphal, he thought it constituted evidence that the American Indians were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. His taking this work seriously thus would make him among the most foolish of the Pharisees.

41. I.e., the canonical Daniel, Ezra, Esther, and Nehemiah.

42. As maintained in the Talmud, Nedarim 37b–38a (Gebhardt V, 71).

43. Cf. Manasseh, 1842/1972, II, 327–28, who adopts a solution advocated as early as *Seder Olam* (2005, 247). Myers comments that “various attempts have been made to interpret the discrepancies, but none is quite satisfactory” (Anchor Ezra-Nehemiah, 20–21).

- 25 [32] There is complete confirmation of this in Nehemiah 7, where this chapter of Ezra (called the letter on genealogy) is copied out (as is expressly said in v. 5), the overall total [given in Nehemiah 7:66] agrees completely with that of the book of Ezra, whereas the subtotals differ greatly. You will find that some subtotals are larger, and others smaller, than they are in Ezra.<sup>44</sup> Together they all add up to 31,089.
- 30 So no doubt many errors have crept into both the book of Ezra and that of Nehemiah, but only in the subtotals.

[33] As for the commentators who try to reconcile these evident contradictions, each one invents what he can, according to the power of his mentality. In the meantime, while they worship the letters and words of Scripture, the only effect of their actions, as we already warned [III/148] above [III/134/25–135/1], is to expose the Writers of the Bible to contempt, so that they seem not to know how to speak, or how to order the things they have to say. All they do is obscure completely what is clear in Scripture. If it were permissible to interpret Scripture

5 everywhere in their way, there would be absolutely no utterance whose true meaning we could not doubt.

[34] But there's no reason to go on at length about these matters. I'm convinced that if some Historian wanted to imitate everything they, in their devotion, permit the Writers of the Bible to do, they would ridicule him on many grounds. If they think it blasphemous

10 to say that Scripture is faulty somewhere, tell me what I should say about people who ascribe to Scripture whatever invention they please? or who so dishonor the Sacred Historians that they are believed to babble and to confuse everything? or who deny the clear and most evident meanings of Scripture? [35] For what is clearer in Scripture than that in the Letter on Genealogy copied out in ch. 2 of the

15 book attributed to him, Ezra (with his colleagues)<sup>45</sup> included in his enumeration of the families all those who set out for Jerusalem? Among them he gives both the number of those who could show their Genealogy, and the number of those who could not [Ezra 2:59–63].

44. Cf. Ezra 2:5 with Neh. 7:10 or Ezra 2:35 with Neh. 7:38. These are among the inconsistencies discussed by Manasseh (1842/1972, II, 328–29), who accepted Ibn Ezra's explanation of the discrepancies, viz. that Nehemiah's list represents a new count made some years later, by which time the numbers had changed. Though Spinoza does not mention this explanation, a number of the points he makes count against it: that the overall total is the same in each account, that some of the individual figures are larger and some smaller in the supposedly later list, and that Neh. 7:5 gives the impression of an intention to reproduce Ezra's account.

45. Totaro suggests that Spinoza is probably referring here to the colleagues who are said in Neh. 8:4 to have stood on the platform with Ezra when he read the book of the law to the people.

What is clearer from Nehemiah 7:5, I ask, than that Nehemiah simply  
 20 copied out this Letter?

[36] So those who explain these passages differently are only denying the true meaning of Scripture, and consequently, denying Scripture itself. As for their thinking it pious to accommodate some passages of Scripture to others,<sup>46</sup> it is a ridiculous piety to accommodate the clear passages to the obscure, the correct to the faulty, and to corrupt the  
 25 sound passages with the rotten. Still, I won't call them blasphemers; they don't intend any evil. To err is indeed human.<sup>47</sup>

But I return to my point. [37] In addition to the errors which must be conceded to exist in the sums of the Letter on Genealogy, both in Ezra and in Nehemiah, there are many also in the names of  
 30 the families, still more in the Genealogies, in the histories and, I'm afraid, even in the Prophecies themselves. For certainly the Prophecy of Jeremiah 22 concerning Jeconiah does not seem to agree at all with his history. Compare particularly the words of the last verse of that chapter with the end of 2 Kings, and of Jeremiah, and 1 Chronicles 3:17–19.<sup>48</sup>

[38] Nor do I see how he could say of Zedekiah, whose eyes were  
 [III/149] gouged out as soon as he had seen his sons put to death [2 Kings 25:7], *you will die in peace etc.* (see Jeremiah 34:5).<sup>49</sup> If Prophecies are to be interpreted according to the outcome, these names would have to be changed and it would seem that for Zedekiah we should read Jeconiah, and conversely. But this would be too great a paradox; and so I prefer to  
 5 leave the matter as one which cannot be perceived—especially because, if there's some error here, it must be attributed to the Historian, not to a defect in the copies.

[39] As for the other errors I've mentioned, I don't think it worthwhile to identify them here. I couldn't do that without wearying the

46. Appuhn and others have suggested that we have here a clear allusion to Manasseh ben Israel's *Conciliator*. But seeking such reconciliations was standard procedure for medieval commentators.

47. Another allusion to the line from Terence previously quoted in the final paragraph of the Preface (where Spinoza had applied it to himself).

48. Jer. 22:24–30 prophesies a harsh fate for Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) in Babylon. Verse 22:30 says he will be childless, and that none of his offspring will sit on the throne of David. But 2 Kings 25:27–30 reports that in the thirty-seventh year of his captivity, when Evil-merodach succeeded Nebuchadnezzar, the new king released Jeconiah from prison and treated him kindly. (The closing verses of Jeremiah repeat the closing verses of 2 Kings.) 1 Chron. 3:17–19 reports that he had seven children, and lists as one of his grandchildren Zerubbabel, whom Cyrus appointed to rule in Jerusalem when the Israelites were released from captivity. Cf. ADN. XXI, at III/141.

49. The problem of reconciling this prophecy with history is discussed in the Talmud, Moed Katan 28b, where it is argued that because Zedekiah survived Nebuchadnezzar, he had the satisfaction of outliving the man who had caused his eyes to be gouged out.

reader—and others have already noted them. [40] Because of the very  
 10 manifest contradictions Rabbi Schlomoh<sup>50</sup> observed in the genealogies  
 related, he was forced to burst out in these words:

*That Ezra (who he thinks wrote the books of Chronicles) calls the sons  
 of Benjamin by different names, treats his genealogy differently than we have  
 15 it in the book of Genesis, and finally, indicates most of the cities of the Levites  
 differently than Joshua did, results from the fact that he found the originals  
 inconsistent.*<sup>51\*</sup>

and a bit further on:

*That the Genealogy of Gibeon and of others is described twice and differently  
 comes from his having found several different Letters giving each Genealogy,  
 and in copying them out he followed the greatest number of copies; but when  
 20 the number of inconsistent copies was equal, then he copied both of them.*

[41] So saying, he grants, without reservation, that these books were  
 copied out from originals which were neither correct enough nor certain  
 enough. Indeed, this is what usually happens: when the commentators  
 devote themselves to reconciling passages, they don't do anything more  
 than indicate the causes of the errors. I don't think anyone of sound  
 25 judgment believes that the Sacred Historians deliberately wanted to  
 write so that they would seem to contradict one another throughout.

[42] But perhaps someone will say that in this way I overthrow  
 Scripture completely—for in this way everyone can suspect that it is  
 faulty everywhere. But that would be wrong. I have shown that in this  
 way I am consulting the interests of Scripture, to prevent the clear and  
 30 uncontaminated passages from being accommodated to, and corrupted  
 by, the faulty ones. The fact that some passages are corrupt does not  
 license suspicion of them all. No book has ever been free of error. Has  
 anyone ever, for this reason, suspected faults everywhere? Of course  
 not, especially when the statement is clear, and we see plainly what the  
 author's intention is.

[43] With this I have finished the things I wanted to mention about  
 [III/150] the history of the Books of the Old Testament. From them we readily  
 infer that before the time of the Maccabees there was no canon of the  
 Sacred Books,<sup>52\*\*</sup> but that the ones we now have were selected from

50. Rabbi Shlomoh ben Yitzchak (1040–1105), the French commentator better known as Rashi, perhaps the most highly esteemed of the medieval Jewish commentators.

51. \*See his commentary on 1 Chronicles 8. [A reference Spinoza gives in the text is here made a note. ALM note that the commentary on Chronicles in Buxtorf's edition is no longer attributed to Rashi.]

52. \*\*[ADN. XXV] The so-called great Synagogue did not begin until after Asia was conquered by the Macedonians. Moreover, what Maimonides, R. Abraham ben David and



- many others by the Pharisees of the second temple, who also instituted the formulas for prayers, and that these books were accepted only because of their decision.<sup>53</sup> [44] So those who want to demonstrate the authority of Holy Scripture are bound to show the authority of each book; proving the divinity of one is not enough to establish the divinity of all. Otherwise we would have to maintain that the council of Pharisees could not have erred in this choice of books, something no one will ever demonstrate.
- [45] The reason which compels me to maintain that only the Pharisees chose the books of the Old Testament and placed them in the canon of Sacred texts is that Daniel 12:2 predicts the resurrection of the dead, which the Sadducees denied. The Pharisees themselves reveal this clearly in the Talmud. For in the Treatise on the Sabbath, II, 30b, it is said
- אמר רבי יהודה משמיה דרב בקשו חכמים לגנוז ספר קהלת מפני שדבריו סותרין דברי תורה ומפני מה לא גזוהו מפני שתחילתו דברי תורה וסופו דברי תורה *R. Jebuda said in Rav's name that the wise men tried to hide the book of Ecclesiastes because its words were contrary to the words of the law* (NB: to the book of the law of Moses) *But why did they not hide it? because it began according to the law and ended according to the law.*<sup>54</sup>

others maintain—that those who presided at this council were Ezra, Daniel, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, etc.—is a ridiculous invention. Its only basis is a rabbinic tradition which teaches that the reign of the Persians lasted 34 years, not more. They do not have any other argument to prove that the decisions of that great Synagogue, *or* Synod, held only by the Pharisees, were received from the Prophets, who received them from other Prophets, and so on back to Moses, who had received them from God himself, and handed them down to posterity orally, not in writing. Although the Pharisees may, with their usual stubbornness, believe these things, the wise, who know what causes Councils and Synods, and are familiar with the controversies of the Pharisees and Sadducees, have easily been able to guess why that great Synagogue *or* Council was convened. This is certain: that no Prophets were present at that council, and that the decisions of the Pharisees, which they call traditions, received their authority from the same Council. [On the history of the idea of a “Great Synagogue” in the Jewish tradition, see Daniel Sperber, “The Great Synagogue,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 19:383–85. The figure of 34 years for the period of Persian rule (which in fact lasted some 200 years) goes back to *Seder Olam*. See Stanley Isser, “Chronology,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 4 (2007): 704–7.]

53. Gebhardt (V, 73) notes that Uriel da Costa had also raised the issue of the Pharisees' role in deciding on the canon, and had in particular questioned the provenance of Daniel. See Gebhardt 1922, 51–52, 59–60.

54. Spinoza returns to an issue first discussed in x, 5. Gebhardt pointed out (V, 73–74) that Spinoza misquotes the Talmud here. The passage should read: “The Sages wished to hide the Book of Ecclesiastes, because its words are self-contradictory; yet why did they not hide it? Because its beginning is religious teaching [Torah] and its end is religious teaching [Torah].” So what the Talmud makes a charge of internal inconsistency in Ecclesiastes Spinoza makes a charge of inconsistency between Ecclesiastes and the Torah. Gebhardt thinks this was a failure of memory. ALM suggest that Spinoza has confused the passage concerning Ecclesiastes with the one concerning Ezekiel cited

[46] And a bit further on:

ואף ספר משלי בקשו לגנוב *and they also tried to hide the book of Proverbs etc.*

And finally, in the Treatise on the Sabbath I, 13b:

25 ברם זכור אותו האיש לטוב נחניה בן חזקיה שמו שאלמלא הוא נגנו ספר יחזקאל שהיו  
 דבריו סותרין דברי תורה *call him a man, surely, because of his beneficence, he*  
*who is called Neghunjia, son of Hezekiah; for if it had not been for him, the*  
*book of Ezekiel would have been hidden, because its words are contrary to the*  
*words of the law.*<sup>55</sup>

[47] From these passages it follows clearly that those who were learned in the law summoned a council to determine which books were to be received as sacred and which were to be excluded. So whoever wants to  
 30 be certain of the authority of all the books should call a council again and require a reason for each one.

[48] Now it would be time to examine the books of the New Testament in the same way. But because I hear that this has been done by men who are most learned both in the sciences and especially in the languages,<sup>56</sup> because I do not have such an exact knowledge of the Greek language that I might dare to undertake this task,<sup>57</sup> and finally, because we lack the original texts of the books written in the Hebrew  
 [III/151] language<sup>58</sup> I prefer to refrain from this difficult business. Nevertheless, I consider that in what follows I indicate the things which contribute most to my plan.

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immediately below. Leiman (1976, 175, n. 322) points out that elsewhere the rabbinic literature indicates other grounds for the withdrawal of Ecclesiastes. Specifically, *Leviticus Rabbah* says that “The Sages wished to withdraw Ecclesiastes because they found in it matters which smacked of heresy” (28:1).

55. Spinoza discussed this passage previously in ii, 49, where he identified Ezekiel’s contradiction of the law as his denial (18:19–20) that God will punish the son for the transgressions of his father. The annotation of this passage in ALM is helpful.

56. Since Spinoza’s method of interpretation—his demand for a “history of scripture” in the sense defined above in vii, 14–23—is apparently original with him, it seems doubtful that any previous writer would have done the necessary work on the NT in the way he would think it should have been done.

57. ALM point out that Spinoza generally quotes Greek texts (the NT, Josephus, pseudo-Philo) in a Latin or Aramaic translation, and that except in ADN. XXVI he does not give any citations in Greek. It does, however, appear from ADN. XXI that he is able to consult the Septuagint when there is a question about the Hebrew text. Gebhardt notes that in addition to several works he possessed which gave the Greek text along with a Latin translation, he also had some which gave only the Greek text (e.g., Epictetus, Lucian, and Homer), a Greek grammar and two Greek dictionaries.

58. At vii, 64, Spinoza identified the gospel of Matthew and the Epistle to the Hebrews as having been written originally in Hebrew. But it appears from ADN. XXVI, at xi, 3, that Spinoza in fact thought the original language of much, if not all, of the New Testament was what we would now call Aramaic. See the Editorial Preface to the TTP, p. 64.

[III/151]

## CHAPTER XI

*Whether the Apostles wrote their Letters  
as Apostles and Prophets, or as Teachers.  
On the function of the Apostles<sup>1</sup>*

[1] No one who has read the New Testament can doubt that the Apostles were Prophets. But the Prophets did not always speak from  
 10 a revelation. On the contrary, they did that very rarely (as we showed at the end of Chapter 1). So we can raise the question: whether the Apostles wrote their Letters as Prophets—from a revelation and by an express command (as Moses, Jeremiah and the other Prophets did)—or whether they wrote them as private persons, or teachers. This question  
 15 arises particularly because in 1 Corinthians 14:6 Paul indicates two kinds of preaching, one from revelation, the other from knowledge.<sup>2</sup> That's why, I say, we must wonder whether the Apostles prophesy or teach in their Letters.

[2] If we're willing to attend to the Apostles' style, we'll find it most unlike that of Prophecy. The most common practice of the Prophets was to testify everywhere that they were speaking according to God's  
 20 edict: *thus says God, the God of hosts says, God's edict etc.* And this seems to have held good not only when the Prophets spoke in public assemblies, but also in the Letters containing revelations. This is evident from the Letter Elijah wrote to Jehoram (see 2 Chronicles 21:12), which also begins *כה אמר יהוה, thus says God.*

25 [3] In the Letters of the Apostles, on the other hand, we read nothing like this. On the contrary, in 1 Corinthians 7:40 Paul speaks according to his own opinion.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in a great many passages there occur ways of speaking characteristic of a mind undecided and perplexed, as (in Romans 3:28) *we think, therefore, [that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law]* and (in

1. ALM note that in this chapter Spinoza generally relies on Tremellius's Latin translation of the Aramaic version of the New Testament. (There are some exceptions.) On Tremellius, see the Editorial Preface, p. 64, the title page, p. 65, n. 1, and ADN. XXVI.

2. 1 Cor. 14:6 reads: "Now brothers and sisters, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I speak to you in some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?"

3. Speaking of the right of a widow to remarry, Paul says that although she is free to do so, "in my judgment she is more blessed if she remains as she is" (NRSV).

- Romans 8:18) *for I think*,<sup>4\*\*</sup> [that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us] and many other passages in this manner. In addition to these, we find other ways of speaking completely removed from Prophetic authority, e.g., *but I say this as one without authority, not as a command* (see 1 Corinthians 7:6),<sup>5</sup> *I give advice as a man, who, by God's grace, is trustworthy* (see 1 Corinthians 7:25),<sup>6</sup> and similarly, many other passages. And it should be noted that when he says in the chapter cited that he has or does not have God's precept or command, he does not mean a precept or command revealed to him by God, but only the teachings Christ imparted to his disciples on the mount.
- [4] Moreover, if we attend also to the way the Apostles hand down the Gospel teaching in these Letters, we shall see that it differs greatly from the way of the Prophets. For the Apostles are always reasoning, with the result that they seem to debate, not to prophesy. Prophecies, on the other hand, contain only bare authoritative judgments and decrees, because in them God is introduced as speaking, and he does not reason, but decides in accordance with the absolute sovereignty of his nature, and also because the authority of the Prophet is not subject to reasoning. For whoever would confirm his authoritative judgments by reason thereby submits them to the discretionary judgment of anyone.

4. \*\*[ADN. XXVI] The interpreters of this passage [Rom. 8:18] translate *logizomai* as *concludo*, *I conclude*, and contend that Paul uses it instead of *sullogizomai* [I conclude] whereas *logizomai* in Greek means the same as חשב in Hebrew, *to calculate, to think, to judge*, in which meaning it agrees best with the Syriac text. For the Syriac translation—if indeed it is a translation, which is doubtful, since we don't know the translator, or when [this text] was circulated, and the native language of the Apostles was Syriac—renders this text of Paul thus: *methrahgenan hachil*, which Tremellius translates very well: *we think, therefore*. For the noun formed from this verb, *rehgiono*, signifies *judgment*; for *rehgiono* in Hebrew is רעיונת, *will*; therefore, *methrahgenan* is *we will or we judge*. [The editions attach this note to the quote from Rom. 3:28, but since the verb there is plural, whereas that in Rom. 8:18 is singular, attaching it to the latter quote probably accords better with Spinoza's intention. The Adnotation uses Syriac script for the Syriac words Spinoza uses. I give only the transliteration provided in Gebhardt and Totaro. Spinoza is apparently wrong in thinking that the Syriac version gives the original of the NT. It is now thought to be a 5th Century translation of the Greek text. See Metzger and Ehrman, pp. 98–99. For more on this, see the Editorial Preface, pp. 64–65.]

5. The NRSV renders this text: "This I say by way of concession, not command." (Paul is recommending that married couples not deprive one another of their conjugal rights.) As ALM note, Spinoza seems to have misread Tremellius's translation, which has *infirmis* (suggesting weakness on the part of the Corinthians to whom the recommendation is given) where Spinoza has *infirmus* (implying a lack of authority on Paul's part).

6. A fuller quotation, in the NRSV, reads: "Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy." (Paul thinks virgins would do best to remain as they are, but that they do not sin if they marry.) Gebhardt and Van Vloten-Land wrongly follow the first edition here, reading: *quia Dei gratia*. ALM correct to: *qui a Dei gratia*.

This Paul seems to have done, because he reasons, saying (1 Corinthi-  
 15 ans 10:15) *I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say*. Finally,  
 [prophecies contain only bare authoritative judgments and decisions]  
 because the Prophets did not perceive the things revealed to them by  
 the power of the natural light. That is, they did not perceive them by  
 reasoning, as we showed in Ch. 1.

[5] In the Pentateuch some conclusions seem to be drawn by infer-  
 20 ence. But anyone who pays attention will see that they cannot in any  
 way be taken as decisive arguments. When Moses said to the Israelites  
 (Deuteronomy 31:27) *if you have been rebels against God while I lived with*  
*you, you will be much more rebellious after I am dead*, he wasn't trying to  
 25 convince them by reason that after his death they would necessarily  
 turn aside from the true worship of God. For that argument would be  
 mistaken, as we could also show from Scripture. The Israelites persevered  
 steadfastly during the lives of Joshua and the Elders,<sup>7</sup> and afterward  
 also during the lives of Samuel, David, Solomon, etc.

[6] So those words of Moses are only a figurative expression, in which  
 30 he predicts the future defection of the people rhetorically, as he was  
 able to imagine it more vividly. Why don't I say that Moses spoke these  
 things on his own authority, to make his prediction probable to the  
 people, and not as a prophet, in accordance with a revelation? Because  
 Deuteronomy 31:21 relates that God revealed this very thing to Moses  
 in other words. It was certainly not necessary to render Moses more  
 [III/153] certain of this prediction and decree of God by probable reasons. But  
 it was necessary that it be represented vividly in his imagination, as  
 we have shown in Ch. 1. There was no way this could be better done  
 than by imagining the present stubbornness of the people, which he  
 had often experienced, as future.

5 [7] This is the way we must understand all the arguments we find  
 Moses using in the Pentateuch. They're not taken from the storehouse  
 of reason, but are only ways of speaking he used to express God's decrees  
 more effectively and imagine them vividly. Nevertheless, I don't wish  
 to deny absolutely that the Prophets were able to argue from revela-  
 10 tion. I only say this: that the more the Prophets argue in due form,  
 the more the knowledge they have of the matter revealed approaches  
 natural knowledge; that their possession of supernatural knowledge  
 is best seen from the fact that they speak simple authoritative judg-  
 ments, whether decrees, or statements; and thus that the greatest of  
 15 the Prophets, Moses, did not make any argument in due form. On the  
 other hand, I grant that Paul's long deductions and arguments, as we

7. That is, the Judges who ruled Israel after the death of Joshua.

find them in his Letter to the Romans, were not in any way written from a supernatural revelation.

[8] So the ways the Apostles both spoke and discussed things in their Letters indicate most clearly that they did not write them from  
 20 revelation and a divine command, but only from their natural judgment. They contain nothing but brotherly advice, mixed with a politeness which Prophetic authority is completely opposed to—as when Paul excuses himself in Romans 15, v. 15: *I have written a bit more boldly to you, brothers.*

25 We can also infer this from the fact that we do not read anywhere that the Apostles were commanded to write, but only to preach wherever they went and to confirm what they said by signs. For their presence and signs were absolutely required for converting the nations to religion and strengthening them in it, as Paul himself explicitly indicates  
 30 in Romans 1, v. 11: *because I long to see you, so that I may impart to you the gift of the Spirit, that you may be strengthened.*

[9] But here someone may object that the same reasoning could equally justify the conclusion that the Apostles did not even preach as Prophets. For when they went about preaching, they didn't do this by an express command, as the Prophets used to. When we read in the Old Testament that Jonah went to Nineveh to preach, we read at the  
 [III/154] same time that he was explicitly sent there, and that it was revealed to him what he had to preach there. Similarly, we're told in detail that Moses set out for Egypt as God's representative, and told at the same time what he was required to say to the people of Israel and to King Pharaoh, and what signs he was to perform in their presence, in  
 5 order to win their trust. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were expressly ordered to preach to the Israelites. And finally, the Prophets preached nothing which Scripture does not testify that they received from God. [10] But we don't read anything like this in the New Testament, when the Apostles went about preaching. Or if we do, it's very rare.<sup>8</sup> On  
 10 the other hand, we find some passages which indicate explicitly that the Apostles chose places for preaching according to their own plan. This is illustrated by that well-known disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, which ended in their parting (see Acts 15:37–[40]). Often they also tried in vain to go somewhere, as that same Paul witnesses in Romans 1, v.13: *I have wanted to come to you these many times, but I*  
 15 *was prevented*, and Romans 15, v. 22: *because of this I have been hindered many times from coming to you.* And finally, 1 Corinthians 16, v. 12: *as*

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8. There's an example in Acts 16:9 (ALM).

*for my brother, Apollos, I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers, but he was not at all willing; however, when he has the opportunity etc.*

- 20 [11] So [the objection continues] from all these things – their ways of speaking, the dispute between the Apostles, and the fact that when they went somewhere to preach, Scripture does not testify (as it does concerning the Prophets of old) that they did so from a command of God—I ought to have concluded that the Apostles preached as teachers, and not as Prophets.

- 25 But we'll settle this question easily if we attend to the difference between the calling of the Apostles and that of the Old Testament Prophets. The latter were not called to preach and prophesy to all nations, but only to certain particular ones. For this they required an explicit and special command for each nation. But the Apostles were  
30 called to preach to absolutely everyone and to convert everyone to religion. So wherever they went, they were carrying out Christ's command and there was no need for them to have the things they were to preach revealed to them before they went—not those disciples of Christ to whom he himself had said: *but when they hand you over, do not be anxious about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what*  
[III/155] *you shall say will be given to you in that hour etc.* See Matthew 10:19–20.

- [12] We conclude, then, that the Apostles had from a special revelation only the things they preached orally, and at the same time confirmed with signs (see what we've shown at the beginning of Chapter 2 [§4]). But what they taught simply, without using any signs as witnesses,  
5 whether in writing or orally, they spoke or wrote from knowledge (i.e., natural knowledge). On this see 1 Corinthians 14:6.

- It's no objection to this that all the Letters begin with an affirmation of [the writer's] status as an Apostle.<sup>9</sup> For as I shall soon show, the Apostles were granted not only the power to prophesy, but also the  
10 authority to teach. [13] For this reason we grant that they wrote their Letters as Apostles, and that this was the reason each one began with an affirmation of his being an Apostle. Or perhaps—to reconcile the reader's heart to them more easily and to get the reader's attention—they wanted above all to testify that they were the ones who had become  
15 known to all the faithful by their preaching and who had then shown by clear testimonies that they taught the true religion and the way to salvation. For whatever discussion I see in these Letters concerning the

9. Not quite true. The letters traditionally ascribed to Paul standardly begin with some such formula as *Paul, a servant of Christ, called to be an apostle*. Similarly for most of the other letters. But the formula is not universal. Hebrews and the letters of John are exceptions.



calling of the Apostles and the Holy and divine Spirit they had, I see to be related to their preachings.

- 20 The only exceptions are those passages where the Spirit of God and the Holy Spirit (which we spoke about in Chapter 1 [§§25ff.]) are taken for a sound mind, blessed and devoted to God, etc. For example, in 1 Corinthians 7:40 Paul says: *but in my opinion she is blessed if she remains as she is; moreover, I think also that the Spirit of God is in me.* By Spirit of God  
25 here he means his own mind, as the context of the statement indicates. For he means: I judge a widow who does not wish to marry a second husband blessed; that is according to my opinion, I who have decided to live celibate and who think that I myself am blessed. And we find many other things in this manner, which I judge it superfluous to mention here.

- 30 [14] So, since we must maintain that the Apostles composed their Letters only according to the natural light, we must now see how the Apostles could teach, solely on the basis of natural knowledge, things which don't fall under it. But if we attend to what we've said in Chapter 7 about the interpretation of Scripture, there will be no difficulty for us here. For though the things contained in the Bible for the most part  
[III/156] surpass our grasp, nevertheless we can discuss them safely, provided the only principles we admit are sought from Scripture itself. And in this same way also the Apostles were able to infer and extract many things from the things they'd seen, the things they'd heard, and finally the  
5 things they'd had from revelation. They were also able to teach men these things, as they pleased.

- [15] Next, although religion, as the Apostles preached it, by relating the simple story of Christ, does not fall under reason, nevertheless, by the natural light everyone can easily appreciate its most important themes, which, like the whole of Christ's teaching,<sup>10\*\*</sup> consist chiefly of  
10 moral lessons. Finally, the Apostles did not need a supernatural light to accommodate to men's common power of understanding the religion they had previously confirmed by signs, so that each one would easily accept it from the heart. Nor did they need it to advise men about that religion.

- 15 [16] That's what the Letters were for: to teach and advise men in the way each Apostle judged best for confirming them in religion. Here we must note what we said a little while ago: that the Apostles received not only the power to preach the story of Christ as Prophets,  
20 confirming it with signs, but also the authority to teach and advise in

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10. \*\*[ADN. XXVII] That is, what Jesus taught on the mount and what St. Matthew mentions in chapter 5ff. [This note appears only in Saint-Glain's translation and seems unlikely to be genuine. See the discussion in ALM, 31.]

the way each one judged best. In 2 Timothy 1:11 Paul<sup>11</sup> indicates each of these gifts clearly: *for this [gospel] I have been appointed a preacher and an Apostle and a teacher of the nations*. Similarly in 1 Timothy 2, v. 7: *for this I have been appointed a preacher and an Apostle (I speak the truth through Christ, I do not lie), a teacher of the nations with faith (NB) and truth*. [17] With these words, I say, he clearly indicates a confirmation of each status: being an Apostle and being a teacher.

But he signifies the authority to advise whomever and whenever he wished in these words (Philemon 8): *although I have much freedom in Christ to command you to do what is proper, nevertheless, [I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love]*. Here it should be noted that if Paul had received from God, as a Prophet, the things it was proper to command Philemon, and if he was supposed to command them as a Prophet, then surely it would not have been permissible for him to change God's command into an entreaty. So he must be understood to speak of a freedom to advise, which was his as a Teacher, and not as a Prophet.

[III/157] [18] Nevertheless, unless we want to appeal to the argument that he who has the authority to teach also has the authority to choose the way he wants to teach, it doesn't yet follow clearly enough that the Apostles could choose the way of teaching each of them judged best, but only that in virtue of their office as Apostles, they were not only Prophets, but also Teachers.

[19] It will be better to demonstrate the whole matter from Scripture alone. For from Paul's words in Romans 15:20 it is clearly established that each of the Apostles chose his individual way: *taking care anxiously that I should not preach where the name of Christ had been invoked, so as not to build on another man's foundation*. [20] Surely if they all had the same way of teaching, and all built the Christian religion on the same foundation, Paul could have no reason to call another Apostle's foundations another man's, since they were the same as his. But since he does call them another man's, we must conclude that each built religion on a different foundation, and that the same thing happened to the Apostles in their teaching as happens to other teachers who have their own individual methods of teaching: they would always rather teach those who are completely uneducated and have not begun to learn languages or sciences from anyone else (or even mathematics, whose truth no one doubts).

[21] Again, if we survey these Letters with some attention, we shall see that in religion itself the Apostles indeed agree, but that they differ

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11. Although both the letters addressed to Timothy purport to be by Paul, "very few scholars now accept that claim" (HCSB, 2015).

greatly in the foundations. For to strengthen men in religion, and to show them that salvation depends only on God's grace, Paul taught  
 25 them that no one can boast of his works, but only of his faith, and that no one is justified by works (see Romans 3:27–28). At the same time, he taught the whole doctrine of predestination.<sup>12</sup> James, on the other hand, taught in his letter that man is justified by works and  
 30 not by faith alone (see James 2:24); setting aside all those arguments of Paul, he expressed in a few words the whole doctrine of religion.

[22] Finally, there is no doubt that the fact that the Apostles built religion on different foundations gave rise to many disputes and schisms, which have tormented the church incessantly from the time of the Apostles to the present day, and will surely continue to torment it  
 [III/158] forever, until at last someday religion is separated from philosophic speculations and reduced to those very few and very simple doctrines Christ taught his followers.

[23] This was impossible for the Apostles, because the Gospel was unfamiliar to men. Lest the novelty of its doctrine greatly offend men's  
 5 ears, they accommodated it as much as they could to their contemporaries' mentality (see 1 Corinthians 9:19–20)<sup>13</sup> and constructed it on the foundations which were most familiar and accepted at that time. [24] That's why none of the Apostles philosophized more than Paul, who was called to preach to the nations. But the others, preaching to  
 10 the Jews, who disdained Philosophy, also accommodated themselves to the mentality of their audience (on this see Galatians 2:11[–14]) and taught a religion devoid of philosophic speculations. How happy our age would surely be now, if we saw religion again free of all superstition!

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12. E.g., in Rom. 8:28–39, 9:11–29, 11:1–10.

13. "For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law" (NRSV).

[III/158]

CHAPTER XII

*On the true original text of the divine Law,  
Why Scripture can be called Sacred, and  
Why it can be called the Word of God.  
Finally it is shown that  
insofar as it contains the Word of God,  
it has reached us uncorrupted*

[1] Those who consider the Bible, just as it is, as a Letter God has sent men from heaven,<sup>1</sup> will no doubt cry out that I have committed a sin against the Holy Ghost,<sup>2</sup> because I've maintained

that the word of God is faulty, mutilated, corrupted, and inconsistent;  
25 that we have only fragments of it, and finally,  
that the original text of the covenant God made with the Jews has been lost.

[2] But I don't doubt that if they were willing to weigh the matter carefully, they would immediately stop protesting. For both reason itself and the statements of the Prophets and Apostles clearly proclaim that  
30 God's eternal word and covenant, and true religion, are inscribed by divine agency in men's hearts, i.e., in the human mind, and that this is the true original text of God, which he himself has stamped with his seal, i.e., with the idea of him, as an image of his divinity.

[III/159] [3] To the first Jews Religion was imparted as a law, handed down in writing, because then they were considered as like infants. But later Moses (Deuteronomy 30:6) and Jeremiah (31:33) proclaimed to them a time to come, when God would inscribe his law in their hearts. So at one time it was appropriate to contend for a law written in tablets  
5 (but only for the Jews, and particularly the Sadducees). It is not suitable at all for those who have it written in their minds.

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1. See, for example, Maimonides' eighth fundamental principle of Judaism, *Maimonides Reader*, 420–21. Droetto/Giancotti cite Augustine (*Exposition 2 of Psalm 30*, §2: "The author is the prophet, but more truly the Holy Spirit who spoke through the prophet") and Gregory the Great (*Epistola XXXI, Ad Theodorum medicum*, PL 77, 706A: "What is Sacred Scripture if not a letter from God omnipotent to his creature?").

2. An allusion to Matt. 12:31–32, which says that one who speaks against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but that one who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not.

[4] Anyone who's willing to attend to these things will find nothing in what I've said above which is contrary to God's word, *or* to true Religion and faith, nor anything which could weaken it. On the contrary, he'll find that we strengthen it, as we've shown also toward the end of  
 10 Chapter 10 [§42]. If this weren't the case, I would have decided to be completely silent about these matters. Indeed, to escape all difficulties, I would have gladly conceded that the most profound mysteries are hidden in Scripture. But because that has given rise to an intolerable superstition and to the other ruinously bad consequences we spoke about in the preamble to Chapter 7 [§§1–6], I thought I ought not to  
 15 refrain from saying these things, especially because religion does not require any superstitious embellishments. On the contrary, its splendor is diminished when it's adorned with such inventions.

[5] But [my critics] will say that, though the divine law is inscribed in our hearts, Scripture is nonetheless the word of God; so, it's no more permissible to say that Scripture is mutilated and distorted than it is to  
 20 say this of the Word of God. I, on the other hand, fear that in their excessive zeal to be holy they may turn Religion into superstition, and indeed, may begin to worship likenesses and images, i.e., paper and ink, in place of the Word of God.

[6] This I know: I've said nothing unworthy of Scripture or the word  
 25 of God. For I've maintained nothing which I have not demonstrated to be true by the most evident arguments. And for this reason I can also affirm with certainty that I have said nothing impious, nor anything which smells of impiety.

I confess that certain profane men, to whom religion is a burden, will be able to take what I have said as a license to sin, and without any reason, but only to surrender to their sensual pleasure, infer from this  
 30 that Scripture is everywhere faulty and falsified, and so of no authority.

[7] But there's no remedy against people like that. As the old adage goes, you can't say anything so correctly that someone can't distort it by misinterpretation.<sup>3</sup> Anyone who wants to indulge in sensual pleasures can easily find a reason for doing so wherever he likes. Those men long ago who had the original texts, and the ark of the covenant—indeed, the  
 [III/160] Prophets and Apostles themselves—were no better or more obedient. Everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, has always been the same; in every age virtue has been extremely rare.<sup>4</sup>

[8] Nevertheless, to remove every scruple, we must show here in  
 5 what way Scripture and any other silent thing ought to be called

3. An allusion to Terence's *Phormio* 696–97 (ALM).

4. Perhaps alluding to, but if so, moderating, Rom. 3:9–12. Cf. Preface, §14; TP vi, 6.

sacred and divine; next, what the word of God really is, and that it isn't contained in a certain number of books; and finally, that insofar as Scripture teaches the things necessary for obedience and salvation, it couldn't have been corrupted. From this everyone will easily be able to judge that we've said nothing against the word of God, and haven't  
 10 given any opening for impiety.

[9] What is called sacred and divine is what is destined for the practice of piety and religion. It will be sacred only so long as men use it in a religious manner. If they cease to be pious, at the same time it too ceases to be sacred. And if they dedicate the same thing  
 15 to impious purposes, then what before was sacred is made unclean and profane.

[10] For example, the Patriarch Jacob called a certain place בית אל, *the house of God* [Genesis 28:16–19], because it was there he worshipped the God who had been revealed to him. But the Prophets called that very place בית און, *the house of iniquity* (see Amos 5:5 and Hosea 10:5), because the Israelites, in accordance with the practice established by  
 20 Jeroboam [1 Kings 12:27–33], used to sacrifice to idols there.

[11] Here's another example, which illustrates the point very clearly. Words have a definite meaning only from their use. If they should be so organized that, according to their usage, they move the people reading them to devotion, then those words will be sacred. So will  
 25 a book written with the words organized that way. But if, afterward, the usage should be lost, so that the words have no meaning, or if the book should be completely neglected, whether from malice or because men no longer need it, then neither the words nor the book will be of any use. They will lose their holiness. Finally, if the same words should be organized in another way, or a usage should prevail according to which they are to be taken in an opposite meaning, then the words and the book which were previously sacred will be unclean  
 30 and profane.

[12] From this it follows that nothing is sacred or profane or impure in itself, outside the mind, but only in relation to the mind. Many passages in Scripture establish this with utmost clarity. To mention one or two, Jeremiah says (7:4) that the Jews of his time wrongly called the temple of Solomon the temple of God. For as he goes on to say  
 [III/161] in the same chapter, the name of God could be associated with that temple only so long as it was frequented by men who worship God and preserve justice. But if it was frequented by murderers, thieves, idolaters, and other wicked men, then it was rather a den of criminals.

5 [13] What became of the ark of the covenant? I've often wondered at the fact that nowhere does Scripture tell us. This much is certain:

it perished, or was burned with the temple,<sup>5</sup> even though the Hebrews had nothing more sacred, nothing they had greater reverence for. In the same way, also, Scripture is sacred and its statements divine just as  
 10 long as it moves men to devotion toward God. But if they completely neglect it, as the Jews once did, it's nothing but paper and ink. They completely profane it, and leave it subject to corruption. So if it's then corrupted, or perishes, it's then false to say that the word of God is corrupted or perishes, just as it would also have been false to say in  
 15 the time of Jeremiah that the temple, which then was the temple of God, perished in flames.

[14] Jeremiah says the same thing about the law itself. For he reproaches the impious people of his time in the following terms: איכה תאמרו חכמים אנחנו ותורת יהוה איתנו הלא לשקר עשה עט שקר סופרים *why do you say, we are wise and the law of God is with us. Certainly it was prepared in*  
 20 *vain; in vain did the pen of the scribes write.*<sup>6</sup> That is, even though you have Scripture, you are wrong to say that you have the law of God after you have made it null and void.

[15] Similarly, when Moses broke the first tablets [Exodus 32:19], what he angrily hurled from his hands and broke was not the word of God—who could even think this of Moses and of the word of God?—but only stones. Though previously these stones were sacred,  
 25 because the covenant was inscribed on them—that covenant by which the Jews had bound themselves to obey God—after they had made that covenant null and void by worshipping the calf, the stones no longer had any holiness. For the same reason, the second tablets<sup>7</sup> could also perish with the ark.

[16] So it's no wonder that Moses' first originals are also not now  
 30 extant and that the things we described above have happened to the books we do have, when the true original of the divine covenant, the holiest thing of all, could totally perish. Let our critics, then, stop accusing us of impiety. We have said nothing against the word of God and have not debased it. If they have any just anger, let them turn it against those ancients whose wickedness took away the religious status  
 [III/162] of God's ark, temple, law, and every other sacred thing, and made them liable to corruption.

5. 1 Kings 8:6–8 reports that when the temple was dedicated, the priests placed the ark of the covenant in its inner sanctuary; 2 Chron. 36:15–21 describes the fall of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple (ALM). But Nebuchadnezzar did take some of the treasures of the temple to Babylon.

6. Where Spinoza has הלא, the Masoretic text has אכן הנה. The reference is to Jer. 8:8, whose translation varies widely, both in ancient and in modern versions. For discussion, see Holladay 1986, 281–83.

7. The new tablets whose making is recorded in Exod. 34.



[17] Again, if, in accordance with what the Apostle says in 2 Corinthians 3:3, they have in themselves the Letter of God, written not in ink, but with the Spirit of God, and not on tablets of stone, but on the fleshly tablets of the heart, let them stop worshipping the letter  
 5 and being so anxious about it.

With this I think I've explained sufficiently in what way Scripture is to be considered Sacred and divine. [18] Now we must see how to rightly understand the expression דבר יהוה, *debar Yahweh* (the word of Yahweh). דבר, *dabar*, of course, means *word*, *utterance*, *edict*, and *thing*.  
 10 Moreover, in Ch. 1 [§§29–31], we showed why a thing is said in Hebrew to be of God and is referred to God. From these considerations we can easily understand what Scripture means by God's word, utterance, edict, and thing. So it's not necessary to repeat all these things here, nor to repeat what we showed regarding miracles, in Ch. 6 [§§39–51]. [19] It will be enough just to call attention to the main points, so that what  
 15 we want to say about these matters here may be better understood.

[First,] when "the word of God" is predicated of some subject which is not God himself, it means properly the Divine law we treated in Ch. 4, that is, the religion common to the whole human race, *or* universal religion. On this see Isaiah 1:10, where he teaches the true way of living, which does not consist in ceremonies, but in loving-kindness and  
 20 a true heart, which he calls, indifferently, God's law and God's word.

[20] Secondly, "the word of God" is taken metaphorically for the very order of nature and fate (because it really depends on and follows from the eternal decree of the divine nature), and especially for what the Prophets had foreseen of this order. It has this meaning because  
 25 they did not perceive future things through natural causes, but as decisions or decrees of God.

[21] Finally, "the word of God" is also taken for every proclamation of a Prophet, insofar as he has perceived it by his own special power, or Prophetic gift, and not by the natural light common [to all]. It has this meaning chiefly because the Prophets were in fact accustomed to  
 30 perceive God as a lawgiver, as we showed in Ch. 4 [§§38–50].

[22] For these three reasons, then, Scripture is called the word of God: because it teaches the true religion, whose eternal author is God; because it relates predictions of future things as God's decrees; and, finally, because those who were really its authors mostly taught, not  
 [III/163] by the common natural light, but by a certain special light, and introduced God as speaking these things. And though Scripture contains in addition many things which are merely historical, and are perceived by the natural light, nevertheless it takes its name ["Word of God"] from what is more precious.

[23] From this we easily see why God should be understood to be  
 5 the author of the Bible: because of the true religion taught in those  
 books, not because he wanted to communicate to men a certain num-  
 ber of books.

[24] And from this we can also know why the Bible is divided into  
 the books of the Old Testament and the New: before the coming  
 of Christ the Prophets were accustomed to preach religion as the  
 10 law of their Country and by the power of the covenant entered into  
 in the time of Moses; but after the coming of Christ the Apostles  
 preached the same [religion] to everyone as a universal law, solely  
 by the power of the passion of Christ. [The books of the New  
 Testament are] not [new] because they are different in doctrine, or  
 because they were written as original texts of a covenant, or because  
 the universal religion was new. That religion, which is most natural,  
 15 was new only in relation to those who had not known it. *He was  
 in the world*, says John the Evangelist (John 1:10), *and yet the world  
 did not know him*.

[25] So even if we had fewer books than we do, either of the Old  
 Testament or of the New, we would still not be deprived of the word  
 of God, by which we ought to understand the true religion (as we've  
 20 already said)—no more than we think now that we are deprived of God's  
 word, even though we lack many other most important writings, like  
 the book of the Law, which was guarded scrupulously in the temple  
 as the original text of the covenant, and the books of the Wars, the  
 Chronicles, and many others, from which the books we have of the Old  
 Testament were gathered and assembled. This conclusion is confirmed  
 25 by many additional arguments.

[26] First, because the books of each Testament weren't written  
 by an explicit command, at one and the same time, for all ages, but  
 by chance, by certain men, as the time and their particular situation  
 required. This is clearly shown by the callings of the Prophets (who  
 30 were called to warn the impious people of their time), and also by the  
 Letters of the Apostles.

[27] Second, because it's one thing to understand Scripture and the  
 mind of the Prophets, and another to understand the mind of God,  
 i.e., the truth of the matter itself. This follows from what we showed in  
 Ch. 2 about the Prophets.<sup>8</sup> And in Ch. 6 we showed that it also applies  
 35 to Histories and miracles.<sup>9</sup> But in no way can we say this about those  
 passages which treat true religion and true virtue.

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8. See particularly ii, 52–53, for a crisp summary of the conclusions of Ch. ii.

9. See particularly vi, 52–64.

[III/164] [28] Third, because the Books of the Old Testament were chosen from many [candidates], and in the end, were assembled and approved by a council of Pharisees, as we showed in Ch. 10 [§45]. Moreover, the books of the New Testament too were added to the Canon by the decisions of certain Councils, which also rejected as illegitimate  
 5 other books many people considered sacred. Now the members of these Councils—both of the Pharisees and of the Christians—were not Prophets, but only Learned and wise men. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that in this choice they had the word of God as a standard. So, before they approved all the books, they must have had knowledge  
 10 of the word of God.

[29] Fourth, because the Apostles did not write as Prophets, but (as we said in the preceding Chapter) as Learned men, and chose the manner of teaching they judged would be easier for the disciples they wanted to teach at that time, it follows (as we also concluded at the  
 15 end of that Chapter) that their letters contain many things which we can now do without in the matter of religion.

[30]<sup>10</sup> Fifth, and finally, because there are four evangelists in the New Testament. Who will believe that God wanted to tell Christ's story four times over, and communicate it to men in writing? It's true that some things are contained in one gospel which are not there in another, so that  
 20 one often aids in understanding the other. Still, we should not conclude from that that everything related in these four works was necessary for men to know, and that God chose the evangelists to write their works so that the Story of Christ would be better understood. [31] For each preached his own Gospel in a different place, and each wrote what he  
 25 preached, simply, to tell the Story of Christ clearly, not to explain the others. If now we sometimes understand them more easily and better by comparing them with one another, that happens by chance and only in a few passages. Even if we knew nothing about those passages, the story would still be equally clear, and men no less blessed.

[32] By these arguments we've shown that Scripture is properly called  
 30 the word of God only in relation to religion, *or* in relation to the universal divine law. Now it remains to show that, insofar as it is properly so-called, it is not faulty, distorted, or mutilated. But what I here call faulty, distorted and mutilated, is what is written and constructed so incorrectly that the meaning of the statement cannot be worked out

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10. Although Spinoza had disavowed any intention of examining the books of the New Testament as he had those of the Old Testament (x, 48), here he does raise critical questions about the gospels: why do we have four different accounts of the life of Jesus? is everything in them necessary for our salvation? if one gospel contains teachings not present in the others, is its teaching essential?

[III/165] from linguistic usage or gathered solely from Scripture. [33] For I don't want to claim that Scripture, insofar as it contains the Divine law, has always preserved the same accents, the same letters and the same words. I leave this to be demonstrated by the Masoretes and those who superstitiously worship the letter. I claim only that the meaning—the only thing in a statement which gives us a reason for calling it divine—has reached us without corruption, even though we may suppose that the words by which it was first signified have very frequently been changed. For as we have said, this does not take anything at all away from the divinity of Scripture. Scripture would be equally divine even if it were written in other words or another language.

10 [34] So no one can doubt that we have received the divine law without its being corrupted in this way. From Scripture itself we have perceived its most important themes without any difficulty or ambiguity: to love God above all else, and to love your neighbor as yourself.<sup>11</sup> But this cannot be forged, nor can it be something written by a hasty or erring pen. For if Scripture ever taught anything other than this, it would also  
15 have had to teach everything else differently, since this is the foundation of the whole religion. If it were taken away, the whole structure would collapse in a moment. [35] Such a Scripture would not be the same book we are speaking about here; it would be a totally different  
20 book. That Scripture has always taught this, that here no error which could corrupt the meaning has crept in, is indisputable. That would be noticed immediately by everyone; no one could have distorted this without his wickedness being obvious.

[36] Since, then, we must maintain that this foundation is uncorrupted, we must also grant the same about those other [teachings]  
25 which uncontroversially follow from it, and are equally fundamental: that God exists; that he provides for all; that he is omnipotent; that in accordance with his decree, things go well with the pious, but badly with the wicked; and that our salvation depends only on his grace. For Scripture everywhere teaches all these things clearly, and must always have taught them. Otherwise all its other teachings would be hollow and without foundation.<sup>12</sup>

30 [37] The remaining moral precepts must be held to be no less uncorrupted, since they follow with utmost clarity from this universal foundation: to defend justice, to aid the poor, to kill no one, to covet nothing belonging to another, and so on. No man's wickedness

11. Cf. Deut. 6:4–9, 10:12–22; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28.

12. Cf. vii, 27, and the annotation there.

could corrupt any of these things; time could not obliterate them. For if any of these teachings were destroyed, their universal foundation  
 [III/166] would have immediately taught them again, especially the teaching of loving-kindness, which both Testaments commend everywhere, in the strongest terms.

[38] What's more, though you can't invent any crime so detestable that no one has ever committed it, still, no one tries to destroy the  
 5 laws to excuse his own crimes, or to introduce anything impious as an eternal and salutary teaching. For we see that man's nature is such that anyone who does something shameful, whether he be a King or a subject, is eager to embellish his deed with such circumstances that he is believed not to have done anything contrary to justice or propriety.  
 10 We conclude, then, without exception, that the whole universal divine law which Scripture teaches, has reached our hands uncorrupted.

[39] In addition to these, there are also other things we can't doubt have been handed down to us in good faith: the main points of the Historical  
 15 Narratives in Scripture. These were quite well known to everyone. The common people among the Jews had long been accustomed to sing the past history of their nation in Psalms. Also, the main points of Christ's deeds and passion were immediately spread throughout the whole Roman Empire.<sup>13</sup> So it's not at all credible that later generations handed down the most important part of these narratives in a form different from that  
 20 in which they had received them from the first generations—not unless most men agreed in this deception, which is incredible.

[40] So whatever has been corrupted or is faulty could have happened only in other matters: for example, in some circumstance of a narrative or a Prophecy, to move the people to greater devotion, or in some miracle, to torment the Philosophers, or, finally, in speculative  
 25 matters, after schismatics had begun to introduce these into religion, so that everyone might prop up his own inventions by abusing divine authority.<sup>14</sup> But it matters little, for our salvation, whether such things have been perverted or not. I shall show this in detail in the following Chapter, though I think it is already established by what I've previously said, especially in Chapter 2.

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13. Some Spinoza scholars take this argument for the reliability of the gospel accounts at face value. Cf. Matheron 1971, p. 85. But Spinoza greatly exaggerates the speed with which the story of Jesus spread throughout the Roman empire, and it seems that he ought to have realized, from his knowledge of Josephus and Tacitus, that even late in the first century knowledge of the life and teachings of Jesus was at best sketchy among non-Christians. See Meier 1991, Chh. 3 and 4.

14. On this subject, see Ehrman 1993.

[III/167]

## CHAPTER XIII

*That Scripture teaches only the simplest matters,  
that it aims only at obedience,  
and teaches nothing about the divine Nature,  
except what men can imitate  
by a certain manner of living*

[1] In Ch. 2 of this Treatise we showed that the Prophets had only a special power to imagine things, not a special power to understand them, that God didn't reveal to them any secrets of Philosophy, but only the simplest matters, and that he accommodated himself to their preconceived opinions.

10 [2] Next, in Ch. 5 we showed that Scripture imparts and teaches things in the way which enables each person to most easily perceive them. It does not deduce them from axioms and definitions and connect them with one another. It just speaks simply. To create trust it confirms what it says only by experience—that is, by miracles and historical  
15 narratives, relating these matters in a style and with expressions most apt to move ordinary people's hearts. On this see Ch. 6, regarding the things demonstrated under heading 3 [§§39–51].

[3] Finally, in Ch. 7 we showed that the difficulty of understanding Scripture lies only in its language, not in the loftiness of its theme.

To these considerations we may add that the Prophets did not preach  
20 to the wise, but to all Jews, without exception, and that the Apostles customarily taught the doctrine of the Gospel in the Churches, places where everyone met.

[4] From all this it follows that the doctrine of Scripture does not contain lofty speculations, or philosophical matters, but only the simplest  
25 things, which anyone, no matter how slow, can perceive.<sup>1</sup> I can't wonder enough at the mentality of the people I spoke about above,<sup>2</sup> who see in Scripture mysteries so profound that no human language can explain them, and who have then introduced into religion so many matters of

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1. ALM note the similarity here between Spinoza and Hobbes, *Leviathan* viii, 26. The issue there is the interpretation of passages in Scripture which seem, on a literal reading, to oppose Copernican astronomy. See also Galileo's *Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina*, in Finocchiaro 1989.

2. See, for example, the Preface, §§15–19, or ix, 33–34.

philosophic speculation that the Church seems to be an Academy, and Religion, science, or rather, a disputation.

- 30 [5] But why should I wonder that men who boast that they have a supernatural light are unwilling to grant superiority in knowledge to Philosophers, who have nothing but the natural light? What would really be wonderful would be if they taught anything new which was a matter of pure speculation, and had not previously been a commonplace  
[III/168] among the pagan Philosophers—whom they nevertheless say have been blind. If you ask what mysteries they see hidden in Scripture, you will find nothing but the inventions of Aristotle or Plato or someone else like that.<sup>3</sup> Often it is easier for any Layman to dream these things up,  
5 than it is for a learned man to find them in Scripture.

[6] Of course we don't want to maintain without qualification that nothing which is a matter of pure speculation pertains to the teaching of Scripture. In the preceding Chapter we cited a number of things of this kind as fundamentals of Scripture [xii, 34–36]. All I maintain is this: there are very few such things, and they're very simple. [7] Moreover,  
10 I've resolved to show here which these are and how they are determined. This will be easy for us now that we know that the purpose of Scripture was not to teach the sciences. From this we can easily judge that it requires nothing from men but obedience, and condemns only stubbornness, not ignorance.

15 [8] Next, obedience to God consists only in the love of your neighbor—for as Paul says in Romans 13:8, he who loves his neighbor in order that he may obey God has fulfilled the Law. From this it follows that the only 'knowledge Scripture commends is that necessary for all men if they are to be able to obey God according to this prescription,  
20 and without which men would necessarily be stiff-necked, or at least lacking in the discipline of obedience. It also follows that Scripture does not touch on speculations which do not tend directly to this end, whether they are concerned with the knowledge of God or the knowledge of natural things. So such speculations ought to be separated from revealed Religion.

25 [9] But even though everyone, as we've said, can now easily see these things, still, because the judgment of the whole of Religion depends on

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3. Cf. Manasseh's commentary on the creation story of Genesis (1842/1972, I, 1–26), which is heavily influenced by Neoplatonic ideas. Note particularly that Manasseh justifies interpreting Mosaic theology in Platonic terms by accepting the theory that Plato had a better knowledge of Mosaic theology than Aristotle did because he had been a disciple of the Jewish elders (I, 8). As late as the nineteenth century Lindo will accept as probable that Plato received instruction from Jeremiah. ALM suggest that Spinoza may also have been thinking of Leo Hebraeus's *Dialogues of Love*, a work which was in his library.



this, I want to show the whole matter more carefully and to explain it more clearly. For this it's necessary to show, before anything else, that the intellectual, *or*, exact, knowledge of God is not a gift common to all the faithful, as obedience is. Next, we must show that the knowl-  
 30 edge God, through the Prophets, has demanded of everyone, without exception, the knowledge everyone is bound to have, is nothing but knowledge of his Divine Justice and Loving-kindness. Both these things are easily demonstrated from Scripture itself.

[10] The first point [that Scripture teaches only a few, very simple truths about the nature of God] follows with utmost clarity from Exodus 6:3, where God says to Moses, to show the special grace he has given  
 [III/169] to him: וָאֵרָא אֶל אַבְרָהָם אֶל יִצְחָק וְאֶל יַעֲקֹב בָּאֵל שַׁדַּי וְשֵׁם יְהוָה לֹא נִדְעָתִי לָהֶם, *and I was revealed to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name Yahweh I was not known to them.*<sup>4</sup> To understand this passage better, note that *El Shaddai* in Hebrew means “God who suffices,” because he gives  
 5 to each person what suffices for that person. And though *Shaddai* by itself is often used for “God,” still, there is no doubt that the name *El*, God, should always be understood.

[11] Next, note that there is no name in Scripture except *Yahweh* which makes known the absolute essence of God, without relation to created things.<sup>5</sup> And therefore the Hebrews contend that only this  
 10 name of God is peculiarly his, the others being common nouns.<sup>6</sup> [12] And really, the other names of God, whether they are substantives or adjectives, are attributes which belong to God insofar as he is considered in relation to created things or is manifested through them. E.g., אֵל, *El*, or (with the paragogic letter ה, *he*) אֱלֹהִים, *Eloah*, means nothing  
 15 but “the powerful,” as we know. And this name belongs to God only in virtue of his excellence, as when we call Paul “the Apostle.”

4. In English translations of the Hebrew Bible “El Shaddai” is commonly rendered “God Almighty.” Genesis does in fact represent all three of the patriarchs as using the name “Yahweh.” See, for example, Gen. 12:8, 15:2, 24:3, 26:22, 27:7, 28:13, 32:10, and 49:1–28. Modern scholarship takes the inconsistency of these passages with Exodus 6:3 as an important indication that they reflect different traditions. Cf. Anchor Genesis, xxii–xliii. Spinoza will offer a different explanation in §§18–19.

5. Cf. the discussion of the divine name in ii, 36, where Spinoza takes Exod. 3:13–15 as his text. Ashkenazi, 25n, suggests that Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Exodus 3:15 may be the most direct source of what Spinoza says here. Manasseh 1842/1972, I, 103–11, provides a useful survey of medieval Jewish commentary on this topic, citing particularly Halevi 1964, II, 2, and Maimonides *Guide* I, 61–63. See also the discussion of this passage in Zac 1965, 79–84.

6. See Spinoza’s classification of the different kinds of noun in ch. 5 of his *Compendium of Hebrew Grammar*. Spinoza uses the term “noun” (*nomen*) quite broadly, classing as nouns “any word by which we signify or indicate something which falls under the intellect” (Gebhardt I, 303). This category includes not only “substantive nouns” (our proper and common nouns), but also adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, participles, and infinitives.

Otherwise the virtues of his power are explained, as *El* (the powerful one) the great, the awe-inspiring, the just, the merciful, etc., or to refer comprehensively to all his virtues at once, this name is used in the plural number,<sup>7</sup> with a singular meaning, a very frequent occurrence in Scripture.

[13] Now, since God says to Moses that he was not known to his forefathers by the name *Yahweh*, it follows that they did not know any attribute of God which explains his absolute essence, but only attributes which explain his effects and promises, i.e., his power, insofar as it is manifested through visible things. [14] But God does not say this to Moses to accuse the patriarchs of lacking faith; on the contrary, his purpose is to praise their trustingness and faith, which led them to believe God's promises to be valid and lasting, even though they did not have a knowledge of God as special as that of Moses. (Although Moses had more lofty thoughts about God, nevertheless he doubted the divine promises, and complained to God that, instead of the promised deliverance, he had changed the Jews' affairs for the worse).<sup>8</sup>

[15] Therefore, since the Patriarchs did not know God's special name, and God tells Moses this fact to praise their simplicity of heart and faith, and at the same time to put on record the special grace granted to Moses, from this our first conclusion follows with utmost clarity: [III/170] men are not obliged by a command to know God's attributes; this is a special gift granted only to some of the faithful.

To show this by many Scriptural testimonies would not be worth the trouble. [16] Who doesn't see that knowledge of God was not equal in all the faithful? who doesn't see that no one can be wise on command, any more than he can live on command, or exist on command? Men, women, children, everyone in fact, is equally able to obey on command. But not everyone is equally able to be wise.

[17] Someone may say: indeed, it's not necessary to understand God's attributes, but it's quite necessary to believe in them, simply, without any demonstration. But anyone who says this is talking nonsense. Invisible things, and those which are the objects only of the mind, can't be seen by any other eyes than by demonstrations.<sup>9</sup> Someone who doesn't have demonstrations doesn't see anything at all in these things. If they repeat something they've heard about them, it no more touches or shows their

7. A reference to the term *Elohim*, which is plural in number, but only sometimes plural in meaning, sometimes being used as a proper name for God.

8. The reference seems to be to Exod. 5:22–23.

9. Cf. E V P23S. The metaphor is also found in Leo Hebraeus, *Dialogues on Love*, 3rd Dialogue (ALM).

mind than do the words of a Parrot or an automaton, which speaks without a mind or without meaning.

15 [18] Before I go any further, I need to show why it's often said in Genesis that the Patriarchs taught in the name Yahweh, which seems completely contrary to what we just said.<sup>10</sup> If we attend to what we showed in Ch. 8, we'll easily be able to reconcile these statements. For in that Chapter we showed that the writer of the Pentateuch does  
20 not indicate things and places by precisely the same names they had in the time he's speaking about, but by the names they were better known by in his own time. [19] So the God the Patriarchs taught in Genesis is indicated by the name Yahweh, not because the forefathers knew him by this name, but because the Jews accorded this name the greatest reverence.

25 We must say this, I maintain, because our passage from Exodus says explicitly that the Patriarchs did not know God by this name, but also because in Exodus 3:13 Moses wants to know God's name. If it had been known before then, Moses too, at least, would have known it. We  
30 must, then, draw the conclusions we were arguing for: that the faithful Patriarchs did not know this name of God, and that the knowledge of God was a gift of God, not a command.

[20] It's time now to pass to the second point, to show that God through the Prophets asks no other knowledge of himself from men than the knowledge of his divine Justice and Loving-kindness, i.e., such attributes of God as men can imitate in a certain way of life. Jeremiah  
[III/171] teaches this most explicitly. [21] For in 22:15[–16], speaking of King Josiah, he says, *אבִּיךָ הָלָא אָכַל וְשָׁתָה וְעָשָׂה מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה בָּאָרֶץ אִז טוֹב לוֹ דָּן דִּין*,<sup>11</sup> *Your father; indeed, ate, and drank, and passed judgment, and did justice, and then (it was) well with him; he judged the right of the poor and the needy, and then (it was) well with him; for (NB) this is to know me, said Yahweh.*

No less clear is the passage in 9:23:<sup>12</sup> *אֵךְ בּוֹזָאת יִתְהַלֵּל הַמִּתְהַלֵּל הַשָּׂכֵל וַיְדוּעַ*  
*אֹתִי, כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה עֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה בָּאָרֶץ כִּי בְּאַלְהֵי חִפְצָתִי נָאֻם יְהוָה*  
10 *one glory only in this, that he understands me and knows me, that I Yahweh practice loving-kindness, judgment and justice on the earth, for I delight in these things, says Yahweh.*

10. The prima facie inconsistency between Exod. 6:3 and passages like Gen. 15:7 was a traditional problem in Jewish biblical commentary, discussed by Manasseh 1842/1972, I, 55–56. See also xiii, 10.

11. The Hebrew text reproduced here (and in the first edition, Gebhardt, and ALM) contains two variations from the Masoretic Text.

12. Verse 9:24 in some Bibles. The Hebrew follows the first edition and ALM, which vary from MT and Gebhardt.

[22] We infer this also from Exodus 34:6–7. There, when Moses wants to see and to come to know him, God reveals only those attributes which display divine Justice and Loving-kindness.

15 Finally, we should note especially that passage in John which we'll discuss later,<sup>13</sup> where, because no one has seen God, he explains God only through loving-kindness, and concludes that whoever has loving-kindness really has and knows God.

[23] We see, then, that Jeremiah, Moses and John sum up the knowledge of God each person is bound to have by locating it only (as we  
20 maintained) in this: that God is supremely just and supremely merciful, *or*, that he is the unique model of the true life.

[24] To this we may add that Scripture does not give explicitly any definition of God, does not prescribe embracing any other attributes of God beyond those just mentioned, and does not explicitly commend  
25 any as it does these. From all this we conclude that the intellectual knowledge of God, which considers his nature as it is in itself (a nature men cannot imitate by any particular way of life and cannot take as a model for instituting the true way of life), does not in any way pertain  
30 to faith or to revealed religion. So men can be completely mistaken about this without wickedness.

[25] It's not at all surprising, then, that God accommodated himself to the imaginations and preconceived opinions of the Prophets, and that (as we showed in Ch. 2 with many examples) the faithful have cultivated different opinions about God.

[26] Again, it's not at all surprising that the Sacred books everywhere  
[III/172] speak so improperly about God, and attribute to him hands, feet, eyes, ears, a mind, and local motion, as well as emotions, like Jealousy, compassion, etc., or that they depict him as a Judge, and as sitting in the heavens on a royal throne, with Christ at his right hand. They speak  
5 according to the power of understanding of the common people, whom Scripture is concerned to make obedient, not learned.

[27] Nevertheless, the general run of Theologians have contended that if they could see by the natural light that any of these things did not agree with the divine nature, they would have to be interpreted metaphorically (whereas what escaped their grasp must be taken literally).  
10 But if everything in Scripture which is found to be of this kind necessarily had to be interpreted and understood metaphorically, Scripture would be written not for ordinary people—and the uneducated common people—but only for the wisest, and especially for Philosophers.

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13. The reference is to 1 John 4:12–16, used as a motto on the title page of the TTP, and discussed in xiv, 17.

[28] Indeed, if it were impious to believe about God the things we have just mentioned—piously and with simplicity of heart—the  
 15 Prophets would surely have been obliged to take the greatest care not to use such expressions, if only out of consideration for the weakness of the common people. On the contrary, they would have, above all, to teach, clearly and explicitly, God's attributes, as each person is bound to accept them. In fact they haven't done this anywhere.

[29] So we must not for a moment believe that opinions, considered  
 20 in themselves and without regard to works, have any piety or impiety in them. Instead we should say that a person believes something piously only insofar as his opinions move him to obedience, and impiously only insofar as he takes a license from them to sin or rebel. So, if anyone becomes stiff-necked by believing truths, he is really impious; on the other hand, if he becomes obedient by believing falsehoods, he has a  
 25 pious faith. For we have shown that the true knowledge of God is not a command, but a divine gift, and that God asks of man no other knowledge [of himself] than knowledge of his divine Justice and Loving-kindness. This knowledge is not necessary for the sciences, but only for obedience.<sup>14</sup>

[III/173]

## CHAPTER XIV

*What is faith, who are the faithful,  
 what the foundations of faith are, and finally,  
 that it is separated from Philosophy*

[1] For a true knowledge of faith the chief thing to know is that Scrip-  
 5 ture is accommodated to the grasp, not only of the Prophets, but also of the fluctuating and inconstant common people of the Jews. No one who pays even a little attention can fail to know that. Anyone who indiscriminately accepts everything contained in Scripture as its universal and unconditional teaching about God, and doesn't know accurately what  
 10 has been accommodated to the grasp of the common people, will be unable not to confuse the opinions of the common people with divine

14. In Colerus's biography of Spinoza there is an anecdote about a conversation he had with his landlady which has seemed to many apt here: "One day his landlady asked him whether he believed that she could be saved in the religion she professed. He answered: 'Your religion is a good one, you need not look for any other, nor doubt that you may be saved in it, provided, whilst you apply yourself to piety, you live at the same time a peaceable and quiet life.'" Colerus 1706, 41. Spinoza's landlady was a Lutheran. For an illuminating discussion of this incident, see Cook 1995.

doctrine, hawk human inventions and fancies as divine teachings, and abuse the authority of Scripture.

[2] Who doesn't see that this is the principal reason why the sectaries  
 15 teach as doctrines of the faith so many and such contrary opinions, and confirm them by many examples from Scripture? That's why it long ago became a Proverb among the Dutch that *geen ketter zonder letter* [There is no heretic without a text.] For the Sacred Books were written not by one person only, nor for the common people of one age, but by many men, of different mentalities, and of different ages.  
 20 If we calculate how long these ages lasted, we will find it to be about two thousand years—possibly much longer.

[3] Still, we don't want to accuse the sectaries of impiety just because they accommodate the words of Scripture to their own opinions. For as Scripture was accommodated to the grasp of the common people, so everyone is permitted to accommodate it to his own opinions, if he  
 25 sees that in that way he can obey God more wholeheartedly in matters of justice and loving-kindness. [4] We do censure them, though, for being unwilling to grant this same freedom to others, and for persecuting, as God's enemies, everyone who does not think as they do, even though they are very honest and obedient to true virtue. On the other  
 30 hand, they still love, as God's elect, those who give lip service to these opinions, even if they are most weak-minded. Nothing more wicked or harmful to the republic can be imagined.

[5] To establish, then, how far each person has the freedom to think  
 [III/174] what he wishes with respect to faith, and whom we are bound to consider faithful, even though they think differently, we must determine what faith and its fundamentals are. I've resolved to do that in this Chapter, and at the same time to separate faith from Philosophy, which was the  
 5 main purpose of this whole work. To show these things in an orderly way, let's review the chief purpose of the whole of Scripture. That will show us the true standard for determining what faith is.

[6] We said in the preceding Chapter that the purpose of Scripture is only to teach obedience. No one can deny this. Who does not see  
 10 that each Testament is nothing but a training in obedience, and that neither Testament has any other aim than that men should obey from a true heart? [7] Not to mention now what I showed in the preceding Chapter [§§1–6], Moses did not try to convince the Israelites by reason, but was concerned only to bind them by a covenant, oaths  
 15 and benefits. Next, he threatened the people with punishment if they did not obey the laws and urged them to obedience with rewards. All these are means only to obedience, not 'knowledge. [8] As for

the teaching of the Gospel, it contains nothing but simple faith: to trust in God, and to revere him, *or* (what is the same thing), to obey him.<sup>1</sup> To demonstrate a matter so obvious, I don't need to heap up Scriptural texts which commend obedience. There are a great many in each Testament.<sup>2</sup>

[9] Next, Scripture also teaches, very clearly and in many places, what each person must do to obey God. The whole law consists only in this: loving one's neighbor. So no one can deny that one who, according to God's command, loves his neighbor as himself is really obedient, and according to the law, blessed. But one who hates or fails to care for his neighbor is a stiff-necked rebel.

[10] Finally, everyone agrees that Scripture was written and published, not only for the learned, but for all people, of every age and kind.<sup>3</sup> From these [three]<sup>4</sup> considerations alone it follows very clearly that the only beliefs we are bound by Scriptural command to have are those which are absolutely necessary to carry out this command. So this command itself is the unique standard of the whole universal faith. Only through it are we to determine all the doctrines of that faith, the beliefs everyone is bound to accept.

[III/175] [11] Since this is very plain, and since everything can be deduced legitimately from this foundation alone, by reason alone, everyone may judge for himself how so many disagreements could have arisen in the Church. Could they have had other causes than the ones we mentioned at the beginning of Ch. 7?

[12] These very disagreements, then, force me to show here how to determine the doctrines of the faith from the foundation we've discovered. Unless I do this, and determine the matter by definite rules, people will rightly think I've done little to advance the discussion. Everyone will be able to introduce whatever he wishes, on the pretext that it's necessary as a means to obedience. This will be especially true when the question concerns the divine attributes.

[13] To show all this in an orderly way, I'll begin with a definition of faith. According to the foundation we've given, faith must be defined as follows:

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1. Note that in the TTP Spinoza never cites any of those passages from John which provide a foundation in the gospels for Christian exclusivism by seeming to make acceptance of theological propositions about Jesus the path to salvation, such as John 3:16–18, 3:36, 11:25–26, 14:6, or 20:31. Cf. his account of Paul's teaching in xi, 21.

2. Cf. above xii, 34, and the passages cited in the note there. See also below, xix, 4.

3. Cf. above xiii, 16.

4. That is, the considerations adduced in §§6–8 (that the only purpose of Scripture is to teach obedience), §9 (that obedience requires only the love of one's neighbor), and §10 (that the commands of Scripture are directed to everyone).



[Faith is] thinking such things about God that if you had no knowledge of them, obedience to God would be destroyed, whereas if you are  
 15 obedient to God, you necessarily have these thoughts.<sup>5</sup>

This definition is so clear, and follows so plainly from the things just demonstrated, that it needs no explanation. [14] Now I'll briefly show what follows from it:

I. Faith is not saving by itself, but only in relation to obedience.

20 Or as James says (James 2:17), faith by itself, without works, is dead. On this, see the whole second chapter of this Apostle's letter. It follows that

II. If someone is truly obedient, he must have a true and saving faith.

[15] For as we've said, if obedience is present, faith is also necessarily present. The same Apostle also says this explicitly in 2:18, viz.: *show*  
 25 *me your faith without works and I shall show you my faith from my works.* And John says (in 1 John 4:7–8): *whoever loves* (i.e., loves his neighbor) *is born of God and knows God; whoever does not love does not know God, for God is Loving-kindness.* [16] From these things it follows next that

III. We can judge no one faithful or unfaithful except from their works.

30 If the works are good, they are still faithful, however much they may disagree with other faithful people in their doctrines. Conversely, if the works are bad, they are unfaithful, however much they may agree in words with other faithful people. For where there is obedience, there faith is also, and faith without works is dead.<sup>6</sup>

[17] John teaches the same thing explicitly in v. 13 of the same chapter: *by this*, he says, *we know that we remain in him and that he*  
 [III/176] *remains in us, because he has given us of his spirit,*<sup>7</sup> viz. Loving-kindness. For he had said previously that God is Loving-kindness, from which

5. Dan Garber, commenting on an earlier draft of this passage, suggested that *quibus ignoratis*, here translated "if you had no knowledge of them," should be rendered "if the person disregards them." This is possible linguistically, but I think xiv, 20–23, indicates that it is a question, not of failing to take note of what you know, or failing to act on what you know, but of not knowing (in a broad sense of "know," where the bar for knowledge is not set high).

6. Spinoza's use of 1 John to support his reduction of faith to obedience apparently aligns the author of this epistle with James rather than Paul in the dispute over justification described in xi, 21–24. If the author of this epistle was also the author of the fourth gospel, and if the author of the fourth gospel is properly aligned with Paul rather than James, Spinoza's alignment will be puzzling. This may be a reason for questioning the traditional ascription of the epistle to the author of the fourth gospel. (There are other reasons, as Brown 1997, 389–91, explains.)

7. 1 John 4:13, Spinoza's motto for the TTP. Cf. the title page.

(according to his principles, accepted at that time) he infers that he who has Loving-kindness really has the Spirit of God. Indeed, because no one has seen God, he infers from that that no one is aware of God, or acknowledges God, except by Loving-kindness toward his neighbor, and that in fact no one can come to know any other attribute of God beyond this Loving-kindness, insofar as we participate in it.

[18] If these arguments are not decisive,<sup>8</sup> still they explain John's intention clearly enough. But much clearer is 1 John 2:3–4, where he teaches in the most explicit terms what we maintain here. *And by this*, he says, *we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says he knows him and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.* From these propositions it follows next that [19]

IV. the real Antichrists are those who persecute honest men who love Justice, because they disagree with them, and do not defend the same doctrines of faith they do.

For we know that loving Justice and Loving-kindness are enough to make a man faithful; and whoever persecutes the faithful is an Antichrist.

[20] Finally, it follows that

V. faith requires, not so much true doctrines, as pious doctrines, i.e., doctrines which move the heart to obedience, even if many of them do not have even a shadow of the truth.

This is true provided the person who accepts them does not know they are false. If he did, he would necessarily be a rebel. For how could someone who is eager to love Justice and to obey God worship as divine something he knows to be foreign to the divine nature? [21] But men can err from simplicity of heart; and as we have shown, Scripture does not condemn ignorance; it condemns only stubbornness.

Indeed, this must follow just from the definition of faith, all of whose elements must be sought from the universal foundation already shown and from the single purpose of the whole of Scripture—unless we want to mix in our own fancies. This definition does not explicitly require true doctrines, but only such doctrines as are necessary for obedience, which strengthen our hearts in love toward our neighbors. It is only because of this love that each of us (to speak with John) is in God and that God is in each of us.<sup>9</sup>

[22] The faith of each person should be considered pious or impious only on account of his obedience or stubbornness, not on account of

8. Bennett described the argument of §17 as “convoluted.” It does appear that Spinoza is not entirely confident that his reasoning is clear and compelling.

9. Alluding again to 1 John 4:13.

its truth or falsity. No one doubts that the common mentality of men  
[III/177] is extremely variable, and that not everyone is equally satisfied by all things. Opinions govern men in different ways: those which move one person to devotion, move another to laughter and contempt.

From this it follows that no doctrines belong to the catholic, *or*  
5 universal, faith which can be controversial among honest men. [23] Since doctrines must be judged only by the works [they encourage], controversial doctrines can be pious in relation to one person and impious in relation to another. Only those doctrines belong to the catholic faith, then, which obedience to God absolutely assumes, and  
10 ignorance of which makes obedience absolutely impossible.<sup>10</sup> As for the rest, since each person knows himself better [than anyone else does], he must think as he sees will be better for him, to strengthen himself in his love of Justice. [24] In this way, I think, no room is left for controversies in the Church.

Now I shall not hesitate to enumerate the doctrines of the universal  
15 faith, *or* the fundamental principles aimed at by the whole of Scripture, all of which (as follows with utmost clarity from what we have shown in these two Chapters)<sup>11</sup> must tend to this point: that there is a supreme being, who loves Justice and Loving-kindness, and whom everyone, if he is to be saved, is bound to obey and to worship by practicing Justice and Loving-kindness toward his neighbor. From this it is easy to  
20 determine what the doctrines are. They are just these:

[25] I. *God exists, i.e., there is a supreme being, supremely just and merciful, or a model of true life.* Anyone who doesn't know, or doesn't believe, that God exists cannot obey him or know him as a Judge.

25 II. *He is unique.* No one can doubt that this too is absolutely required for supreme devotion, admiration and love toward God. For devotion, admiration and love arise only because the excellence of one surpasses that of the rest.

[26] III. *He is present everywhere, or everything is open to him.* If people believed some things were hidden from him, or did not know that he sees all, they would have doubts about the equity of the Justice by which he directs all things—or at least they would not be aware of it.

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10. Bennett notes that here Spinoza seems to take the relevant beliefs to be both necessary and sufficient for obedience, and to think that his definition in xiv, 13, says as much. He objects that it doesn't (since the second clause of the definition is the contrapositive of the first, not its converse). Spinoza's use of 1 John 2:3–4 suggests that he does indeed intend to assert a biconditional; xiv, 29, seems particularly clear that the beliefs are necessary for obedience. That they should also be sufficient for obedience, though, seems inconsistent with Spinoza's teaching in the *Ethics* concerning weakness of will. Cf. E IV P17S.

11. That is, as I take it, from what has been shown in Chs. xii and xiii.

- 30 IV. *He has the supreme right and dominion over all things, and does nothing because he is compelled by a law,<sup>12</sup> but acts only according to his absolute good pleasure and special grace.* For everyone is absolutely bound to obey him, whereas he is not bound to obey anyone.

[27] V. *The worship of God and obedience to him consist only in Justice and Loving-kindness, or in love toward one's neighbor;*

- [III/178] VI. *Everyone who obeys God by living in this way is saved; the rest, who live under the control of pleasures, are lost.* If men did not firmly believe this, there would be no reason why they should prefer to obey God rather than pleasures; and

- 5 [28] VII. *Finally, God pardons the sins of those who repent.* No one is without sin.<sup>13</sup> So if we did not maintain this, everyone would despair of his salvation, and there would be no reason why anyone would believe God to be merciful. Moreover, whoever firmly believes that God, out of mercy and the grace by which he directs everything, pardons men's sins, and who for this reason is more inspired by the love of God, that person really knows  
10 Christ according to the Spirit, and Christ is in him.

[29] No one can fail to be aware that it is especially necessary to know all these things for men to be able, without exception, to obey God according to the command of the Law explained above. If any of these doctrines is taken away, obedience also is destroyed.

[30] As for the rest, it doesn't matter, as far as faith is concerned, [what anyone believes about such matters as]:

- 15 [i] what God (*or* that model of true life) is, whether he is fire, spirit, light, thought, etc., or

[ii] how he is a model of true life, whether because he has a just and merciful heart, or because all things exist and act through him (and hence that we too understand through him, and see through him, what is truly right, and good).

- 20 It's all the same, whatever each person maintains about these things.

[31] Again, it also doesn't matter, as far as faith is concerned, if someone believes

[iii] that God is everywhere according to his essence or according to his power, or

[iv] that he directs things from freedom or by a necessity of nature, or

[v] that he prescribes laws as a prince or teaches them as eternal truths, or

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12. That is (as Matheron suggests in ALM), by a law someone else imposes on him.

13. ALM mention Eccles. 7:20, previously cited in iii, 38. We might add John 8:7 or Rom. 3:9–20. But Spinoza's reading of Eccles. 7:20 seems less bleak than Paul's, whose paraphrase of Eccles. in Rom. 3:10 (possibly influenced by the Septuagint translation) is quite harsh. See iii, 38, and TP, ii, 8.

- 25 [vi] that man obeys God from freedom of the will or from the necessity of the divine decree, or finally,
- [vii] that the reward of the good and punishment of the evil are natural or supernatural.

[32] It doesn't matter, I say, as far as faith is concerned, how each person understands these and similar things, provided he doesn't conclude that he may take a greater license to sin, or that he should become  
 30 less obedient to God. In fact, as we've already said, each person is bound to accommodate these doctrines of faith to his own power of understanding, and to interpret them for himself, as it seems to him easier for him to accept them without any hesitation, with complete agreement of the heart, so that he may obey God wholeheartedly. [33] For as we've already noted, the faith was originally revealed and written  
 [III/179] according to the grasp and opinions of the Prophets, and of the common people of that time. In the same way, everyone now is bound to accommodate it to his own opinions, so that he can accept it without any mental conflict and without any hesitation. For we've shown that  
 5 faith requires piety more than it does truth, and that it's pious and saving only because of the person's obedience. So no one is faithful except by reason of obedience. The person who displays the best arguments is not necessarily the one who displays the best faith; instead it's the one who displays the best works of Justice and Loving-kindness.

10 [34] How salutary this Doctrine is, how necessary in the republic, if people are to live peacefully and harmoniously, how many, and how great, are the causes of disturbance and wickedness it prevents—these things I leave everyone to judge for himself.

[35] But before I go any further, we should note here that from what we've just shown we can easily reply to the objections raised in Ch. 1  
 15 [§§13–18], when we discussed God's speaking to the Israelites from Mt. Sinai. [36] Though the voice the Israelites heard could not give them any philosophical *or* mathematical certainty about God's existence, still, it was enough to make them wonder at God, insofar as they had previously known him, and to motivate them to obedience. That was the  
 20 purpose of that manifestation. God did not want to teach the Israelites the absolute attributes of his essence. (He did not reveal any of them at that time.) He wanted to break their stubborn heart and win them over to obedience. So he addressed them with the sound of trumpets, with  
 25 thunder, and with lightning, not with arguments. See Exodus 20:[18–21].<sup>14</sup>

14. Spinoza has Exod. 20:20, but the reference is clearly to the verses numbered 18–21 in the NRSV (and 15–18 in the NJPS translation).

[37] What remains now is for me to show, finally, that there are no dealings, or no relationship, between faith, *or* Theology, and Philosophy. No one can fail to see this now, who knows that these two faculties aim at, and are based on, completely different things. [38] For the goal  
 30 of Philosophy is nothing but truth. But the goal of Faith, as we've shown abundantly, is nothing but obedience and piety. Furthermore, the foundations of Philosophy are common notions, and [its truth] must be sought only from nature. But the foundations of Faith are histories and language, and [those foundations] must be sought only from Scripture and revelation, as we showed in Ch. 7.

[39] Faith, therefore, grants everyone the greatest freedom to phi-  
 [III/180] losophize, so that without wickedness he can think whatever he wishes about anything. Faith condemns as heretics and schismatics only those who teach opinions which encourage obstinacy, hatred, quarrels and anger. On the other hand, it considers faithful only those who encour-  
 5 age Justice and Loving-kindness as far as the powers of their reason and their faculties permit.

[40] Finally, since the things we have shown here are the main points I have been aiming at in this treatise, before I go any further I want to ask the reader most earnestly to take the time to read these two Chapters quite carefully, to weigh them again and again, and to be  
 10 persuaded that we did not write them with the intention of introducing any novelties, but only to correct distortions, which we hope someday, finally, to see corrected.<sup>15</sup>

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15. In the TTP Spinoza pursues two lines of argument to show that we should be free to philosophize: one via considerations about the nature of religion and the nature of philosophy, the other via considerations about the state. Chs. xiii and xiv represent the culmination of the first of these lines of argument.

[III/180]

## CHAPTER XV

*Showing that Theology should not be  
the handmaid of Reason,  
nor Reason the handmaid of Theology,  
and the reason which persuades us  
of the authority of Holy Scripture*

[1] Those who don't know how to separate Philosophy from Theology debate whether Scripture should be the handmaid of reason, or reason should be the handmaid of Scripture—that is, whether the meaning of  
20 Scripture ought to be accommodated to reason, or reason ought to be accommodated to Scripture. The skeptics, who deny the certainty of reason, defend the accommodation of reason to Scripture. The dogmatists defend the accommodation of Scripture to reason.

[2] But what we've already said shows that both parties are completely mistaken. Whichever opinion we follow, we must corrupt either reason or Scripture. We've shown that Scripture does not teach philosophic  
25 matters, but only religious duty, and that everything contained in it was accommodated to the grasp and preconceived opinions of the common people. [3] So those who want to accommodate it to Philosophy ascribe to the Prophets many things they did not think of even in their dreams, and interpret their meaning wrongly. On the other hand, those who  
30 make reason and Philosophy the handmaid of Theology are bound to admit as divine teachings the prejudices of the common people of long ago, to fill their minds with those prejudices, and to blind themselves. Each is insane, the former with reason, the latter without it.<sup>1</sup>

[4] The first person among the Pharisees who openly maintained that  
[III/181] Scripture must be accommodated to reason was Maimonides, whose opinion we reviewed in Ch. 7, and refuted by many arguments. Though this author had great authority among [the Pharisees], nevertheless most of them part from him in this matter, and follow the opinion of  
5 a certain R. Judah Alfakhar,<sup>2</sup> who, in his desire to avoid Maimonides' error, fell into the opposite mistake.

1. Echoing Terence's *Eunuchus* I, 63 (ALM).

2. Judah Alfakhar (d. 1235), a doctor in the court of Ferdinand III of Castile, was one of the leaders of the Jewish community in Toledo, who opposed Maimonides' use of Greek philosophy to interpret Scripture. The letter Spinoza cites was addressed to David



[5] Alfakhar maintained<sup>3\*</sup> that reason should be the handmaid of Scripture and should be made completely subordinate to it. He did not think that anything in Scripture should be explained metaphorically merely because the literal meaning was contrary to reason, but only  
 10 because it was contrary to Scripture itself, i.e., to its clear doctrines. From this he forms a universal rule: whatever Scripture teaches as doctrine,<sup>4\*\*</sup> and affirms in explicit terms, must be admitted unconditionally as true, simply in virtue of the authority of Scripture.<sup>5</sup> No other doctrine will be found in the Bible which is directly contrary to it, though some may be found which are contrary to it by implication.  
 15 Scripture's ways of speaking often seem to presuppose something contrary to what it has explicitly taught. For that reason, only those passages [which seem contrary to Scripture's explicit teachings] are to be explained metaphorically.

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Kimchi, a prominent thirteenth-century defender of Maimonides. For a translation of the letter and helpful background, see Adler 1996. Preus 1995 has argued persuasively that in criticizing "Alfakhar" Spinoza is really attacking certain contemporary opponents, orthodox Calvinists, whose views it was safer for Spinoza to discuss under the cover of representing them as the views of a Jewish philosopher.

3. \*I remember having once read these doctrines in a Letter against Maimonides, included along with the Letters attributed to Maimonides. [The first two sentences of this paragraph fairly represent Alfakhar's position as articulated in the letter translated in Adler 1996, 151.]

4. \*\*[ADN. XXVIII] See *Philosophy the Interpreter of Scripture*, p. 75. [This adnotation occurs only in Marchand's copy of the adnotations, and is probably his own note, not Spinoza's. See the discussion in the Editorial Preface to the TTP, p. 62, and Preus 1995. On that assumption, Marchand is calling attention to a similarity between Alfakhar's position, as articulated by Spinoza, and the position of an unnamed Calvinist opponent, as articulated by Meyer. The passage Marchand refers to occurs in Meyer 1666, 75 (Meyer 2005, 169–70). The letter of Alfakhar translated in Adler 1996 contains no such universal rule, and Adler has suggested (in personal correspondence, April 2015) that if Alfakhar had stated a rule, it would no doubt have been Rule 13 of Rabbi Ishmael: "When two passages [seem to] contradict each other, [they are to be elucidated by] a third passage that reconciles them" (Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Siddur* [Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2009], 54). Adler observes that "these thirteen rules are found in the introduction to the *Sifra*, a midrash on the book of Leviticus. When he was still an observant Jew, Spinoza would have recited these rules every morning as part of the daily prayers. They are found, for example, in the prayer book *Seder Tefilot* (Amsterdam: Menasseh Ben Israel, 1626), p. 37b." Adler conjectures that Alfakhar is likely to have been a mask for Jacobus du Bois, a Calvinist preacher in Leiden. Whatever the identity of Meyer's opponent, Spinoza's characterization of this position seems to owe more to Meyer than it does to Alfakhar.]

5. As I translate *dogmatic*, Spinoza formulates the rule as applying only to things which Scripture teaches *as doctrine*, i.e., as propositions the faithful are required to believe. This would allow that statements which don't rise to the level of doctrine (the details of historical narratives, perhaps) don't fall under the rule. I see no such distinction in Alfakhar. Arguably the idea that Scripture teaches certain things as doctrines which must be accepted is "a very un-Jewish manner of speaking about scripture" (Preus 1995, 371–72). Nor does Alfakhar think Scripture never explicitly contradicts its teachings. He allows that there are several scriptural passages which contradict one another on the subject of God's corporeality.

[6] For example, Scripture teaches clearly that God is unique (see Deuteronomy 6:4), and you do not find any other passage, anywhere, directly affirming that there is more than one God.<sup>6</sup> But there are  
 20 numerous passages where God speaks of himself, and the Prophets speak of God, in the plural number.<sup>7</sup> It's only this manner of speaking which presupposes that there is more than one God; it does not show that this was the speaker's intent. So all these passages are to be explained metaphorically—not because it's contrary to reason that there is more than one God, but because Scripture itself directly affirms that God is unique.

25 [7] Similarly, because Scripture (in Deuteronomy 4:15) directly affirms (as he thinks) that God is incorporeal,<sup>8</sup> we are therefore bound to believe that God does not have a body—solely on the authority of this passage, not on the authority of reason. So, it's only by the authority of Scripture that we are bound to explain metaphorically all the pas-  
 30 sages which attribute to God hands, feet, etc.<sup>9</sup> [On this view] it is only a manner of speaking in these passages which seems to presuppose that God has a body.

[8] That's the opinion of this author. Insofar as he wants to explain Scripture by Scripture, I praise him. But I'm amazed that a man endowed  
 [III/182] with reason should be so eager to destroy reason. It's certainly true that Scripture ought to be explained by Scripture, so long as we're only working out the meaning of the statements and the Prophets' intention. But once we've unearthed the true meaning, we must, necessarily, use judgment and reason to give it our assent. [9] If reason must still  
 5 be made completely subordinate to Scripture, however much it may protest against it, I ask whether we ought to subordinate it with reason

6. Cf. ii, 36–40.

7. One passage where God apparently speaks of himself in the plural number would be Gen. 1:26, discussed by Manasseh 1842/1972, I, 13–15. An example of a passage where a prophet speaks of God in a way implying plurality might be Isa. 48:16, discussed by Manasseh, 1842/1972, II, 162–63. Malet suggests that Spinoza may have in mind those passages in which *Elohim* is used as the divine name with a plural verb. Grammatically, *Elohim* is plural, but normally it takes a singular verb, suggesting that in those passages the term was understood to be singular in meaning. Malet cites a number of exceptions to this rule, where the combination of *Elohim* with a plural verb raises doubts about the way the subject was understood. See Malet 1966, 231n.

8. Deut. 4:15–16 reads: “For your own sake, therefore, be most careful—since you saw no shape when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire—not to act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness whatever.” This is not one of the passages Alfakhar cites in his discussion of God's corporeality.

9. The subject of God's corporeality was a major topic in Maimonides' *Guide*, whose first seventy chapters provide many examples of the kind of passage referred to here. Some of these were previously discussed in ii, 42–43, where the subject is the related topic of God's visibility.

or without it, like blind men? If without reason, then of course we're acting foolishly and without judgment. If with reason, then we embrace Scripture only by the command of reason. We would not, therefore, embrace it if it were contrary to reason.

[10] I ask you, who can embrace something in his mind in spite of  
 10 the protests of reason? What else is denying something in your mind but the fact that reason protests against it? I can find no words to express my amazement that people should want to make reason, [God's] greatest gift, a divine light, subordinate to dead letters—which men's wicked conduct could have corrupted—that it should be thought no crime to speak unworthily against the mind, the true original text of  
 15 God's word, and to maintain that it is corrupt, blind, and lost, but that it should be considered the greatest crime to think such things about the letter, the image of God's word.<sup>10</sup>

[11] They think it pious to trust nothing to reason and their own judgment, but impious to doubt the good faith of those who handed down the Sacred Books to us. That's just folly, not piety. What are they  
 20 worried about? What are they afraid of? Can't Religion and faith be defended unless men deliberately make themselves ignorant of everything, and say farewell to reason completely? If that's what they believe, they're more fearful for Scripture than trusting in it. [12] But it's far from true that Religion and piety want reason to be their handmaid, or that reason wants Religion to be its handmaid. Each can maintain  
 25 control of its own domain with the utmost harmony. More on this shortly. First, I want to examine here the Rule of that Rabbi.

[13] As we've said, [Alfakhar] holds [i] that we're bound to accept as true whatever Scripture affirms, and reject as false whatever it denies; and [ii] that Scripture never explicitly affirms or denies anything con-  
 30 trary to what it's affirmed or denied in another passage.<sup>11</sup> No one can fail to see how rash it is to say these things. [14] For—not to mention now that he hasn't paid attention to the fact that Scripture is made up of different books, written at different times, by different authors, for different men—or that he says these things on his own authority  
 [III/183] (since reason and Scripture say nothing of the kind)— he ought to have shown that all the passages which are contrary to others only by implication can be suitably explained, from the nature of the language

10. Cf. the Preface, §§17 and 23. Spinoza's position in this paragraph seems to illustrate the position on the relation between will and intellect developed in E II P49S (and discussed in Curley 1975).

11. Alfakhar does not make the distinction Spinoza relies on here: between what Scripture says explicitly and what it says by implication.

and the purpose of the passage, as metaphors. And he ought also to have shown that Scripture has reached our hands uncorrupted.

[15] But let's examine the matter in an orderly way. About his first  
 5 claim, [i], I ask: what if reason protests? are we still bound to accept as  
 true what Scripture affirms and reject as false what it denies? Perhaps  
 he will add that there is nothing in Scripture contrary to reason. But  
 I insist that it explicitly affirms and teaches that God is jealous (e.g.,  
 10 in the Decalogue itself [Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 5:9], in Exodus  
 34:14,<sup>12</sup> in Deuteronomy 4:24, and in numerous other places).<sup>13</sup> But  
 this is contrary to reason. Still [by Alfakhar's principles] it must be  
 asserted as true. Indeed, if certain passages are found in Scripture which  
 presuppose that God is not jealous, they would have to be explained  
 metaphorically, so that they did not seem to presuppose any such thing.

[16] Similarly, Scripture says explicitly that God came down upon  
 15 mount Sinai (see Exodus 19:20),<sup>14</sup> and attributes other local motions  
 to him.<sup>15</sup> Nowhere does it explicitly teach that God does not move. So  
 everyone must admit that this too is true [i.e., that God moves from  
 one place to another]. When Solomon says (1 Kings 8:27) that God is  
 20 not contained in any place, since he has not explicitly maintained that  
 God does not move, but it only follows from that that he doesn't, this  
 will have to be explained in a way that does not seem to take local  
 motion away from God.

[17] Similarly, the heavens would have to be taken as God's dwelling  
 place and throne, because Scripture explicitly affirms this.<sup>16</sup> And in this  
 way a great many things said in accordance with the opinions of the  
 25 Prophets and the common people—which only reason and Philosophy  
 teach to be false, not Scripture—all these things would nevertheless  
 have to be supposed to be true, according to the opinion of this author,  
 because there is no consulting reason in these matters.

[18] Next, [Alfakhar] is just wrong when he claims that one passage  
 is contrary to another only by implication, never directly. For Moses  
 30 affirms directly that *God is a fire* (see Deuteronomy 4:24) and denies  
 directly that God has any likeness to visible things (see Deuteronomy  
 4:12).<sup>17</sup> If he should reply that the latter passage does not deny directly  
 that God is a fire, but only denies it by implication, and hence that the

12. Accepting V-L's (1914) emendation. The first edition, which Gebhardt follows, reads 4:14.

13. Maimonides gives numerous examples in the *Guide* I, 36.

14. Discussed in Manasseh 1842/1972, I, 152–53.

15. Maimonides' *Guide* discusses numerous examples (e.g., in I, 10, 12, 18, 21, etc.).

16. For examples of the kinds of passage at issue, see Maimonides, *Guide* I, 8, 9, 11.

17. Spinoza returns to the example discussed in vii, 18–22.

latter passage must be accommodated to the former—all right! Let us grant that God is a fire. Or rather, so as not to rave with him, let us [III/184] set these examples to one side and bring forward another.

[19] Samuel<sup>18\*\*</sup> directly denies that God repents of his judgment (see 1 Samuel 15:29), whereas Jeremiah, on the contrary, affirms that God repents of the good and of the evil which he had decreed (Jeremiah 5 18:8–10). Are these passages not directly opposed to one another? Which of the two does he want to explain metaphorically? Each statement is universal and contrary to the other. What the one directly affirms, the other directly denies. So [Alfakhar] himself, according to his own rule, is bound to embrace as true what he is also bound to reject as false.

[20] Another point: what does it matter if one passage is not directly 10 contrary to the other, but only contrary to the other by implication, if the principle of inference is clear and the circumstances and nature of the passage do not allow metaphorical explanations? There are a great many such passages in the Bible. See Ch. 2, where we showed that the Prophets had different and contrary opinions. See especially 15 all the contradictions we showed in the Histories (see Chs. 9 and 10). [21] I don't need to review all these matters here. What I've already said is enough to show the absurdities which follow from this position and rule, to show its falsity and its author's rashness.

So we've demolished Alfakhar's position as well as that of Maimonides. 20 We've established, unshakably, that Theology is not bound to be the handmaid of reason, nor reason the handmaid of Theology, but that each rules its own domain. As we've said: reason's domain is truth and wisdom; Theology's is piety and obedience. [22] For as we've shown, the power of reason does not go so far as to enable it to determine 25 that men can be blessed by obedience alone, without understanding things. But Theology teaches nothing but this, and does not command anything but obedience. It neither wills nor can do anything against reason. [23] For as we showed in the preceding chapter, it determines the doctrines of faith only so far as is sufficient for obedience. But pre- 30 cisely how those doctrines are to be understood, with respect to their truth, it leaves to be determined by reason, which is really the light of the mind, without which it sees nothing but dreams and inventions.

18. \*\*[ADN. XXIX] See *Philosophy the Interpreter of Holy Scripture*, p. 76. [March- and refers here to Meyer 1666 (Meyer 2005, 171–72). Meyer uses somewhat different examples to make the same point. E.g., he cites both 1 Sam. 15:29 and Num. 23:19 to illustrate Scripture's claim that God does not repent or change his mind, and Gen. 6:6 and Exod. 32:14 as examples of passages where God is said to do just that. He seems clearly to be aware that there are other passages he might have cited, e.g., Gen. 18:22–33; 1 Sam. 15:35; Jon. 3:9–10; Amos 7:3. The problem is discussed in Manasseh 1842/1972, I, 35–36, II, 200–201.]

[24] By Theology here I understand, in brief, revelation, insofar as it indicates the goal we said Scripture aims at: the principle and manner of obedience, *or* the doctrines of true piety and faith. This is what  
 [III/185] is properly called the word of God. It does not consist in a certain number of books. On this see Ch. 12. For if you consider the precepts of Theology taken in this sense, *or* its teachings concerning life, you will find that it agrees with reason; if you consider its intent and end, you will find that it contains nothing contrary to reason. That's why  
 5 it is common to everyone.

[25] As for the whole of Scripture in general, we've already shown in Ch. 7 that its meaning is to be determined only from its history, and not from the universal history of Nature, which is the foundation only of Philosophy. If, after we have discovered its true meaning  
 10 in this way, we find that here or there it is contrary to reason, this should not give us any pause. For whatever we find in the Bible of this kind, whatever men can fail to know without detriment to their loving-kindness, we know with certainty does not touch Theology *or* the word of God. So anyone can think whatever he likes about these matters, without wickedness.<sup>19</sup> We conclude, therefore, uncondition-  
 15 ally, that Scripture is not to be accommodated to reason, nor reason to Scripture.

[26] Nevertheless, we cannot demonstrate by reason whether the foundation of Theology—that men are saved only by obedience—is true or false. So someone may raise against us too the objection: why then do we believe it? If we embrace it without reason, like blind men,  
 20 then we too act foolishly and without judgment. [27] On the other hand, if we want to maintain that we can demonstrate this foundation rationally, then Theology will be a part of Philosophy, and ought not to be separated from it.

To this I reply that I maintain unconditionally that the natural light  
 25 cannot discover this fundamental tenet of Theology—or at least that no one yet has demonstrated it. So revelation has been most necessary. Nevertheless, I maintain that we can use our judgment, so that we accept what has already been revealed with at least moral certainty. [28] I say with moral certainty, for we should not expect to be able to be more certain of it than the Prophets were. As we've already shown  
 30 in Ch. 2 of this Treatise, those who first received the revelation had a certainty which was only moral.

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19. So, for example, even though it's clear that Joshua believed that the sun moves around the earth (ii, 26), we are nonetheless free to accept a Copernican theory of the solar system.

[29] So those who try to show the authority of Scripture by mathematical demonstrations are completely misguided.<sup>20</sup> For the authority of the Bible depends on the authority of the Prophets. So it can't be  
 [III/186] demonstrated by any stronger arguments than those the Prophets used long ago to persuade the people of their own authority. Indeed, our certainty about this can't have any other foundation than the one on which the Prophets founded their own certainty and authority.

[30] We've shown [ii, 4–10] that the whole certainty of the Prophets is based on three considerations:

- 5 (i) a distinct and vivid imagination,
- (ii) a Sign, and finally (and principally),
- (iii) a heart inclined toward the right and the good.

The certainty and authority the Prophets themselves had were not based on any other reasons. So they could not demonstrate their authority by any other reasons—not even to the people to whom they previously spoke orally, much less to us, to whom they now speak in writing.

10 [31] But the first consideration, that they imagined things vividly, could be established only for the Prophets [themselves]. So our whole certainty about revelation can and must be founded only on the other two considerations, the Sign and the Doctrine.

And indeed Moses too explicitly teaches this. [32] For in Deuteronomy 18[:15–22] he commands the people to obey the Prophet who  
 15 has given a true sign in the name of God, but to condemn him to death if he has predicted something falsely, even if [he made that prediction] in the name of God. He also commands them to condemn to death the Prophet who has tried to seduce the people away from true religion, even if he has confirmed his authority by signs and wonders. On this see Deuteronomy 13[:1–5].

[33] From this it follows that a true Prophet is distinguished from a false one by doctrine and miracle taken together. For Moses declares  
 20 a Prophet who satisfies these conditions to be a true one, and he commands the people to trust him without any fear of fraud. And he says that they are false Prophets, punishable by death, who have predicted something falsely, even if in the name of God, or who have taught false Gods, even if they have performed true miracles.

[34] So we too are bound to believe Scripture, i.e., the Prophets themselves, only for this reason, i.e., because of their teaching, confirmed

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20. Giancotti (following Meli) suggests that Faustus Socinus is under attack here. His *De auctoritate S. Scripturae* (1580) defends the position Spinoza attacks. For an English translation of this work, see Socinus 1580.



25 by signs. Since we see that the Prophets commend Loving-kindness and Justice above all, and aim at nothing else, we conclude from this that they did not teach with an evil intent, but from a true heart, that men become blessed by obedience and faith. And because they confirmed this in addition with signs, we're persuaded that they did not say this  
30 rashly, and were not insane when they were prophesying.

[35] In this we're even more confirmed when we pay attention to the fact that they taught no moral doctrine which does not agree fully with reason. It's no accident that the word of God in the Prophets agrees completely with the word of God speaking in us. We're as certain of these things from the Bible as the Jews once were when they inferred the same things from the living voice of the Prophets. [36] For we  
[III/187] have shown above, toward the end of Ch. 12 [§§38–39], that, in its teaching and principal historical narratives, Scripture has reached our hands uncorrupted.

So even though this foundation of the whole of Theology and Scripture cannot be shown by a mathematical demonstration, we can  
5 still embrace it with sound judgment. [37] For it's sheer stupidity to be unwilling to embrace what has been confirmed by so many testimonies of the Prophets—and what, moreover, is a great comfort to those whose powers of reason are not strong, what brings no slight advantage to the Republic, and what we can believe with absolutely no risk or  
10 harm—merely because it can't be mathematically demonstrated. This would be as if, to organize our lives wisely, we should admit nothing as true which can be called in doubt by any reason for doubting, or as if most of our actions were not uncertain and full of risk.<sup>21</sup>

[38] I confess, of course, that people who think Philosophy and  
15 Theology contradict one another, who therefore think that one or the other must be toppled from its throne, and that it's necessary to say goodbye to one or the other—these people have some reason to want to lay down firm foundations for Theology, and to try to demonstrate it mathematically. Who but someone desperate and mad would want to recklessly say goodbye to reason, or to scorn the arts and sciences,  
20 and deny the certainty of reason?

[39] But we can't completely excuse them. They want to call upon reason to repudiate reason, and by a certain reason make reason uncertain. While they're trying to show the truth and authority of Theology  
25 by mathematical demonstrations, and to take away the authority of reason and the natural light, all they're doing is dragging Theology under the

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21. ALM note several allusions to Terence in this passage. Specifically, to *Phormio* I, 77; *Andria* I, 67; *Eunuchus* I, 61–63.

control of reason. They clearly seem to suppose that Theology has no brilliance unless it's illuminated by the natural light.

[40] On the other hand, if they boast that they trust completely in the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, and call reason to their aid only to convince nonbelievers, we can't trust what they say. For we can easily show that they say this either from the affects or from vain-glory.

[41] For from Chapter 14 it follows as clearly as can be that the Holy Spirit gives testimony only concerning good works. That's why even

[III/188] Paul calls them the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Really, the Holy Spirit is nothing but a satisfaction which arises in the mind from good actions. [42] The only Spirit which gives testimony concerning the truth and certainty in speculative matters is reason.

5 As we've already shown, only reason has laid claim to the domain of truth for itself. If anyone says he has a Spirit other than [reason] which makes him certain of the truth, he's making a false boast. He's speaking only from a prejudice stemming from his affects—or else he's fleeing for protection to sacred things, fearing that he'll be defeated by the  
10 Philosophers and exposed to public ridicule. But it won't work. What refuge can he make for himself if he commits treason against reason?

[43] But let's put these people to one side. I think I've said enough in defense of my cause. I've shown how Philosophy is to be separated from Theology, what each principally consists in, and that neither should be the handmaid of the other, but that each has charge of its own domain  
15 without any conflict with the other. Finally, when the opportunity presented itself, I've also shown the absurdities, disadvantages, and harms which have followed from the strange ways men have confused these two faculties, and have not known how to distinguish accurately between them, and to separate them from one another.

20 [44] Before I proceed to other things, I want to remind you—even though I've said this already<sup>22\*\*</sup>—that I judge the utility, even necessity, of Sacred Scripture, *or* revelation, to be very great. We can't perceive by the natural light that simple obedience is a path to salvation.<sup>23\*\*</sup> Only  
25 revelation teaches that this happens, by a special grace of God, which we cannot grasp by reason. It follows that Scripture has brought great comfort to mortals. [45] Everyone, without exception, can obey. But

22. \*\*[ADN. XXX] See *Philosophy the Interpreter of Scripture*, p. 115. [Marchand refers again to Meyer 1666. In Meyer 2005 the page reference would be to 235–41].

23. \*\*[ADN. XXXI] That is, revelation can teach that it's enough for salvation *or* blessedness to embrace the divine decrees as laws *or* commands, and that it's not necessary to conceive them as eternal truths. Reason can't teach this. This is evident from what was demonstrated in Ch. 4. [The "extra text" Gebhardt adds to this note from the version in Saint-Glain seems to reflect just a (trivially) different way of translating the Latin rather than a genuinely alternative text.]

only a very few (compared with the whole human race) acquire a habit of virtue from the guidance of reason alone. So, if we didn't have this testimony of Scripture, we would doubt nearly everyone's salvation.

[III/189]

CHAPTER XVI

*On the Foundations of the Republic;  
on the natural and civil right of each person;  
and on the Right of the Supreme 'Powers*

[1] So far we've taken care to separate Philosophy from Theology and  
5 to show the freedom of philosophizing which [Theology]<sup>1</sup> grants to  
everyone. Now it's time for us to ask how far this freedom of thought,  
and of saying what you think, extends in the best Republic. To examine  
this in an orderly way, we must discuss the foundations of the Republic,  
10 and first, the natural right of each person, without attending yet to the  
Republic or to Religion.

[2] By the right and established practice of nature I mean nothing  
but the rules of the nature of each individual, according to which we  
conceive each thing to be naturally determined to existing and having  
15 effects in a certain way. For example, fish are determined by nature  
to swimming, and the large ones to eating the smaller. So it is by the  
supreme right of nature that fish are masters of the water, and that the  
large ones eat the smaller.

[3] For it's certain that nature, considered absolutely, has the supreme  
right to do everything it can, i.e., that the right of nature extends as far  
20 as its power does. For the power of nature is the power of God itself,  
and he has the supreme right over all things.<sup>2</sup> [4] But the universal  
power of the whole of nature is nothing but the power of all individu-  
als together. From this it follows that each individual has a supreme  
right to do everything it can, *or* that the right of each thing extends  
25 as far as its determinate power does. Now the supreme law of nature  
is that each thing strives to persevere in its state, as far as it can by its

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1. Spinoza has a demonstrative pronoun here (*haec*, this). Some translators have taken *haec* to refer to the separation between philosophy and theology; but most take it to refer to theology. Ch. xiv, 39, supports that interpretation.

2. In ii, 38, Spinoza had made God's supreme right over all things a central point of Mosaic theology, deriving it from his creative activity. Here the Mosaic idea is combined with one which goes back to Pliny, that the power of God and the power of nature are identical. Cf. i, 44; iii, 9; and vi, 9.

own power, and does this, not on account of anything else, but only of itself. From this it follows that each individual has the supreme right to do this, i.e. (as I have said), to exist and have effects as it is  
 30 naturally determined to do.<sup>3</sup>

[5] Nor do we recognize here any difference between men and other individuals in nature, nor between men endowed with reason and those others who are ignorant of true reason, nor between fools and mad-  
 [III/190] men, and those who are sensible and sane. For whatever each thing does according to the laws of its nature, it does with supreme right, because it acts as it has been determined to do according to nature, and cannot do otherwise.

[6] So among men who are considered as living only under the rule of nature, one who does not yet know reason, or does not yet have a  
 5 habit of virtue, has a supreme right to live according to the laws of appetite alone—just as much as one who guides his life according to the laws of reason. I.e., just as the wise man has the supreme right to do everything which reason dictates, *or* to live according to the laws of reason, so also the ignorant and weak-minded have the supreme right to do everything appetite urges, *or* to live according to the laws  
 10 of appetite. This is just what Paul teaches, when he recognizes no sin before the law,<sup>4</sup> i.e., so long as men are considered as living only according to the rule of nature.

[7] The natural right of each man is determined not by sound reason, but by desire and power. For not all men are naturally determined to  
 15 operate according to the rules and laws of reason. On the contrary, everyone is born ignorant of everything. Before men can know the true principle of living and acquire a virtuous disposition, much of their life has passed, even if they have been well brought up. Meanwhile, they are bound to live, and to preserve themselves, as far as they can by  
 20 their own power, i.e., by the prompting of appetite alone. Nature has given them nothing else. It has denied them the actual power to live according to sound reason. So they're no more bound to live according to the laws of a sound mind than a cat is bound to live according to the laws of a lion's nature.

3. Cf. Hobbes, DCv I, 7–10.

4. At III/54/14–15 Spinoza had cited Rom. 4:15—“where there is no law, there is no violation”—in support of attributing to Paul the idea that there is no sin without a commandment and a law. Perhaps Rom. 5:13 would have been clearer support for Spinoza's view: “sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned where there is no law.” I take this to mean that the appetites and actions the law subsequently condemned as sinful existed prior to the promulgation of the law, but that those appetites were not genuinely sinful until there was a law which prohibited them. That seems consistent with Spinoza's position here.

[8] Whatever anyone who is considered to be only under the rule  
 25 of nature judges to be useful for himself—whether under the guidance  
 of sound reason or by the prompting of the affects—he is permitted,  
 by supreme natural right, to want and to take—by force, by deception,  
 by entreaties, or by whatever way is, in the end, easiest. Consequently,  
 he is permitted to regard as an enemy anyone who wants to prevent  
 him from doing what he intends to do.

30 [9] From these considerations it follows that the Right and Estab-  
 lished Practice of nature, under which all are born and for the most  
 part live, prohibits nothing except what no one desires and what no one  
 can do: not disputes, not hatreds, not anger, not deception. Without  
 qualification, it is not averse to anything appetite urges.

[10] This is not surprising. Nature is not constrained by the laws of  
 [III/191] human reason, which aim only at man's true advantage and preservation.  
 It is governed by infinite other laws, which look to the eternal order of  
 the whole of nature, of which man is only a small part. It is only by the  
 necessity of this order that all individuals are determined to exist and  
 have effects in a definite way. [11] So when anything in nature seems  
 5 to us ridiculous, absurd, or evil, that's because we know things only in  
 part, and for the most part are ignorant of the order and coherence of  
 the whole of nature, and because we want everything to be directed  
 according to the usage of our reason—even though what reason says is  
 evil is not evil in relation to the order and laws of nature as a whole,  
 10 but only in relation to the laws of our nature.<sup>5</sup>

[12] Still, no one can doubt how much more advantageous it is to  
 man to live according to the laws and certain dictates of our reason.  
 As we've said, these laws and dictates aim only at the true advantage  
 of men. There's no one who does not desire to live securely, and as  
 15 far as possible, without fear. But this simply can't happen so long as  
 everyone is permitted to do whatever he likes, and reason is granted  
 no more right than hatred and anger. [13] There is no one who  
 lives among hostilities, hatreds, anger and deceptions, who does not  
 live anxiously, and who does not strive to avoid these things, as far  
 as he can.

Also (as we showed in Ch. 5 [§§18–20]), if we consider that without  
 20 mutual aid men must live most wretchedly and without any cultivation  
 of reason, we shall see very clearly that to live, not only securely, but  
 very well, men had to agree in having one purpose. So they brought  
 it about that they would have collectively the natural right each one  
 had to all things. It would no longer be determined according to the

5. §§10–11 will be repeated in the TP, ii, 8.

25 force and appetite of each one, but according to the power and will of everyone together.

[14] Nevertheless, they would have tried this in vain if they wanted to follow only what appetite urges. For according to the laws of appetite each person is drawn in a different direction. So they had to make a  
 30 very firm resolution and contract to direct everything only according to the dictate of reason. No one dares to be openly contrary to that, for fear of seeming mindless. They had to agree to rein in their appetites, insofar as those appetites urge something harmful to someone else, to do nothing to anyone which they would not want done to themselves, and finally, to defend another person's right as if it were their own.

[15] And now we cannot fail to see how they had to enter into this contract, to make it valid and lasting. For it's a universal law of human nature that no one neglects to pursue what he judges to be good, unless  
 [III/192] he hopes for a greater good, or fears a greater harm. Nor does anyone submit to any evil, except to avoid a greater one, or because he hopes for a greater good. Between two goods, each person chooses the one he judges to be greater; between two evils, the one which seems to him lesser.

I say explicitly: the one which *seems* to the person choosing to be  
 5 greater or lesser. It does not follow that things must be as he judges them to be. [16] This law is so firmly inscribed in human nature, that it ought to be numbered among the eternal truths, which no one can fail to know.

From this it follows necessarily that no one will promise to give up the right he has to all things except with intent to deceive,<sup>6\*\*</sup> and that  
 10 absolutely no one will stand by his promises unless he fears a greater evil or hopes for a greater good. [17] To understand this better, suppose a Robber forces me to promise him that I'll give him my goods when he wishes.<sup>7</sup> Since, as I've already shown, my natural right is determined only by my power, it's certain that if I can free myself from this Robber  
 15 by deceptively promising him whatever he wishes, I'm permitted to do this by natural right, to contract deceptively for whatever he wishes.

[18] Or suppose that without intent to deceive I've promised someone that for twenty days I won't taste food, or any nourishment at all, and

6. \*\*[ADN. XXXII] In the civil state, where there is a common law which decides what is good and what is evil, we rightly distinguish between a good and an evil intent to deceive. But in the state of nature, where everyone is his own judge, and has the supreme right to prescribe and interpret laws for himself, indeed, even to disregard them, as he judges it to be more advantageous for himself, there it cannot be conceived that anyone acts in bad faith.

7. Spinoza's position here contrasts interestingly with that of Hobbes (cf. DCv ii, 16; *Leviathan* xiv, 27). See also Grotius, *De jure belli* III, xix.

that afterward I see that this promise was foolish, that I can't keep it without very great injury. Since, by natural law, I'm bound to choose  
 20 the lesser of two evils,<sup>8</sup> I can, with supreme right, break faith with such a contract, and treat what I have said as if I hadn't said it. [19] And I say that natural right permits this, whether I see by a true and certain reason that I made a bad promise, or merely seem to see this by opinion. For whether I see this truly or falsely, I shall fear a very great evil, and according to the established practice of nature, strive to avoid it in every way.

25 [20] From these considerations we conclude that a contract can have no force except by reason of its utility.<sup>9</sup> If the utility is taken away, the contract is taken away with it, and remains null and void. For that reason it's foolish to demand of someone that he keep faith with you forever, unless you try at the same time to bring it about that breaking the contract you're entering into brings more harm than utility to the one who breaks it.

30 This is especially applicable to the institution of the Republic. [21] If all men could easily be led just by the guidance of reason, and could recognize the supreme utility and necessity of the Republic, there would be no one who would not absolutely detest deceptions. With the utmost good faith, everyone would stand by their contracts completely, out of a desire for this supreme good, the preservation of the Republic. Above  
 [III/193] all else, they would maintain trust, the chief protection of the Republic.

[22] But it's far from true that everyone can always be easily led just by the guidance of reason. Everyone is drawn by his own pleasure.<sup>10</sup> Most of the time the mind is so filled with greed, love of esteem, envy, anger, etc., that there's no room for reason. [23] That's why, though men  
 5 may promise with definite signs of an ingenuous intention, and contract to maintain trust, still, no one can be certain of another's good faith unless something else is added to the promise.<sup>11</sup> For by natural right each person can act deceptively, and is bound to stand by the contract only by the hope of a greater good or the fear of a greater evil.

8. "Natural law" here translates *jus naturale*, a phrase discussed in the Glossary under LAW, RIGHT, where this passage is cited as illustrating an apparently prescriptive use of *jus naturale*. Also relevant, the Glossary entry BOUND. But in the first sentence of the next section *jus naturale* is translated "natural right."

9. Wernham suggests that reflection on this conclusion may have helped convince Spinoza that the contract was superfluous. Perhaps this is why there is less emphasis on a contract in the TP.

10. An allusion to Virgil's *Eclogues* ii, 65 (ALM).

11. Wernham cites Hobbes, DCv v, 4–5. Those who think Spinoza has read some version of *Leviathan* might think xvii, 2, of that work also relevant. What must be added to the promise is the probability of punishment for breaking it. "Covenants without the sword are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all."



[24] Because we've already shown that [each person's] natural right is  
 10 determined only by his power, it follows that as much of his power as  
 he transfers to another, whether because he's forced to, or voluntarily,  
 so much of his right does he also necessarily give up to the other  
 person. It follows also that if a person has the supreme 'power, which  
 enables him to compel everyone by force, and restrain them by fear of  
 15 the supreme punishment (which everyone, without exception, fears),<sup>12</sup>  
 then that person has the supreme right over everyone. He will retain  
 this right just so long as he preserves this power of doing whatever he  
 wishes. Otherwise he will command by entreaty; no one stronger will  
 be bound to obey him unless he wishes to.

[25] This, then, is the way

20 [i] a social order can be formed consistently with natural right, and

[ii] every contract can always be preserved with the utmost good faith—

if each person transfers all the power he has to the social order, which  
 alone will retain the supreme right of nature over all things. That is, the  
 social order alone will have sovereignty, and each person will be bound  
 to obey it, either freely, or from fear of the supreme punishment. [26]

25 The right of such a social order is called Democracy. This is defined,  
 then, as a general assembly of men which has, as a body, the supreme  
 right over everything in its power.

From this it follows that no law binds the supreme 'power. Everyone  
 must obey it in everything. For everyone had to agree to this, either  
 tacitly or explicitly, when they transferred to the supreme 'power all  
 30 their power to defend themselves, i.e., all their right. [27] If they  
 wished to keep anything for themselves, they ought at the same time  
 to have taken care that they could defend it safely. Since they did not  
 do that—and could not do it without dividing, and thereby destroying,  
 the sovereignty<sup>13</sup>—by this act they submitted themselves absolutely to  
 the will of the supreme 'power. Since they did this unconditionally,  
 [III/194] and (as we've already shown) were both compelled to it by necessity  
 and urged to it by reason, it follows that unless we want to be enemies  
 of the state, and act contrary to reason, which urges us to defend the  
 state with all our powers, we're bound to carry out absolutely all the  
 commands of the supreme 'power—even if it commands the greatest

12. It seems to have been quite traditional to make the right to inflict the death penalty one of the essential marks of sovereignty. Cf. Grotius, *De jure belli* I, iii, 6; Hobbes, DCv ii, 18; Pufendorf, *De jure naturae* VIII, iii, 1; Locke, *Two Treatises* II, 1.

13. I take it that Spinoza here accepts the logic of the argument of Hobbes and Bodin, that sovereignty is indivisible. Cf. DCv vi, 6–11; *Leviathan* xviii, 16.

absurdities. For reason commands that we carry out even those orders,  
 5 so as to choose the lesser of two evils.

[28] Moreover, everyone was easily able to run the risk of submitting himself absolutely to the command and will of another. For as we've shown, this right of commanding whatever they wish belongs to the supreme 'powers only so long as they really have the supreme 'power.  
 10 If they should lose [that 'power], they also lose, at the same time, the right of commanding all things. [The right] falls to him or those who have acquired it and can retain it.

[29] So only very rarely can it happen that the supreme 'powers command great absurdities. To look out for their own interests and retain their sovereignty, it is incumbent on them most of all to consult  
 15 the common good, and to direct everything according to the dictate of reason. As Seneca says,<sup>14</sup> no one continues a violent rule for long.

[30] To this we may add that in a democratic state, absurdities are less to be feared. If the assembly is large, it's almost impossible that the majority of its members should agree on one absurd action.<sup>15</sup> Again,  
 20 as we've also shown, its foundation and end are precisely to avoid the absurdities of appetite, and to confine men within the limits of reason, as far as possible, so that they may live harmoniously and peacefully. If this foundation is removed, the whole structure will easily fall. [31] It's incumbent only on the supreme 'power, then, to provide for these things, and on the subjects, as we have said, to carry out its commands,  
 25 and not to recognize any other right than that which the supreme 'power declares to be right.

[32] Perhaps someone will think that in this way we make subjects slaves, because he thinks someone who acts according to a command is a slave, whereas someone who governs his conduct according to his own heart is a free man.

But this is not absolutely true. Really, the person who is drawn by his  
 30 own pleasure, and can neither see nor do anything useful to himself, is most a slave. The only free person is the one who lives wholeheartedly according to the guidance of reason alone.

[33] An action done on a command—obedience—does, in some measure, take away freedom. But that isn't what makes the slave. It's the reason for the action. If the end of the action is not the advantage of the agent himself, but of the person who issues the command, then the agent is a slave, useless to himself. [34] But in a Republic, and a state

14. *Troades* 258, previously cited in v, 22 (ALM).

15. Like Machiavelli (*Discourses* I, 54), Spinoza believes in the wisdom of crowds. Cf. TP vii, 5.

[III/195] where the supreme law is the well-being of the whole people, not that of the ruler,<sup>16</sup> someone who obeys the supreme 'power in everything should not be called a slave, useless to himself, but a subject.

So that Republic is most free whose laws are founded on sound reason. For there each person, when he wishes, can be free,<sup>17\*\*</sup> i.e., live  
 5 wholeheartedly according to the guidance of reason. [35] Similarly, even though children are bound to obey all the commands of their parents, they are still not slaves. For their parents' commands are primarily concerned with the advantage of the children.

We recognize a great difference, then, between a slave, a son, and a subject. We define these as follows:

10 a *slave* is someone who is bound to obey the commands of a master, which are concerned only with the advantage of the person issuing the command;

a *son* is someone who does what is advantageous for himself, in accordance with a parent's command; and

a *subject*, finally, is someone who does what is advantageous for the collective body—and hence, also for himself—in accordance with the command of the supreme 'power.

15 [36] With this I think I have shown sufficiently clearly what the foundations of the democratic state are. I preferred to treat it before all others, because it seemed the most natural state, and the one which approached most nearly the freedom nature concedes to everyone. In it no one so transfers his natural right to another that in the future there is no consultation with him. Instead he transfers it to the greater part  
 20 of the whole Society, of which he makes one part. In this way everyone remains equal, as they were before, in the state of nature.

[37] Again, I wanted to treat in detail only this state because it was most suitable for my purpose, since I had decided to discuss the utility of freedom in a Republic. I pass over the foundations of the other

16. An allusion to Cicero, *De legibus* III, 3: *salus populi suprema lex esto* (ALM).

17. \*\*[ADN. XXXIII] No matter what state a man is in, he can be free. For certainly a man is free just insofar as he is led by reason. But (contrary to Hobbes) reason urges peace in all circumstances; moreover, peace cannot be obtained unless the common laws of the state are maintained without infringement. So the more a man is led by reason, i.e., the more he is free, the more will he steadfastly maintain the state's laws and carry out the commands of the supreme 'power to which he is subject. [Laird (1934, 300) criticized Spinoza's grasp of Hobbes in this note. But Spinoza's comment does say something contrary to what Hobbes says in DCv ii, 2, where the first law of nature is "to seek peace where it can be had, and where it cannot, to seek the helps of war." In *Leviathan* Hobbes' position is different, but still contrary to Spinoza's. The first law is to seek peace, "as far as he has hope of attaining it," but when it cannot be obtained, the right of nature permits him "to seek and use all the helps and advantages of war" (xiv, 4).]

forms of 'power. For us to recognize their right, it's not necessary now  
 25 to know what their origin is or how they often arise. That's established  
 more than clearly enough by what we have just shown. [38] For who-  
 ever has the supreme 'power, whether it's one person, or a few, or  
 everyone, it's certain that he possesses the supreme right to command  
 whatever he wishes. Moreover, it's certain that whoever has transferred  
 his 'power to defend himself to another, whether voluntarily or because  
 30 compelled by force, has completely yielded him his natural right, and  
 consequently has decided to obey him in absolutely everything. He is  
 bound to make good this decision so long as the King, or the Nobles,  
 or the People, keep the supreme 'power they received, which was the  
 basis of the transfer of right. I need add no more.

[39] Now that we have shown what the foundations and right of the  
 [III/196] state are, it will be easy to determine what private civil right, injury,  
 justice and injustice are in the civil state; and again, who is an ally, who  
 an enemy, and what the crime of treason is.

[40]<sup>18</sup> By *private civil right* we can understand nothing but the freedom  
 5 each person has to preserve himself in his state, which is determined by  
 the edicts of the supreme 'power, and is defended only by its authority.  
 For after each person has transferred his right to live according to his  
 own good pleasure, a right which used to be limited only by his own  
 'power—that is, has transferred to another his freedom and power to  
 defend himself—he is bound to live now solely by that other's reason,  
 10 and to defend himself solely by its protection.

[41] An *injury* occurs when a citizen or subject is forced to suffer a  
 harm from someone else, contrary to the civil law, *or* to an edict of the  
 supreme 'power. For an injury cannot be conceived except in a civil state;  
 and the supreme 'powers (to whom, by right, all things are permitted)  
 cannot do an injury to their subjects. An injury can occur only among  
 15 private persons who are bound by law not to harm one another.

[42] *Justice* is a constancy of mind in apportioning to each person  
 what belongs to him according to civil law. *Injustice* is taking away from  
 someone, under the pretext of right, what belongs to him according to  
 the true interpretation of the laws. Justice and injustice are also called  
 equity and inequity, because those who are established to settle disputes  
 20 are bound to have no regard for persons, but to treat everyone as equals,  
 and to defend the right of each person equally, without envying the  
 rich, or disdaining the poor.

[43] *Allies* are men of two states, which, to avoid the danger of war,  
 or to gain some other advantage, contract with one another not to harm

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18. Reading *quod* for *quo* in Gebhardt l. 7, and *se defendere* for *defendere* in l. 10. (ALM)

25 one another, but to come to one another's aid when in need, though each retains its own sovereignty. [44] This contract will be valid just as long as its foundation, the principle of danger, *or* of advantage, is present. For no one makes a contract or is bound to stand by a contract, except out of hope for some good, or anxiety about some evil. If  
 30 this foundation should be removed, the contract is removed of itself.

Experience also teaches this, as clearly as one could wish. [45] For though two different states may contract with one another not to harm one another, they still strive, as far as they can, to prevent the other from becoming too powerful. And they don't trust what's been said, unless they've seen clearly enough the end and advantage for which each one contracts. Otherwise, they fear deception, and not without  
 [III/197] just cause. For who trusts what someone else has said and promised, when the other person continues to have the supreme 'power and right to do whatever he pleases, and is someone whose supreme law must be the well-being and advantage of his state? Who but a fool, who does not know the right the supreme 'powers have?

[46] Moreover, if we attend to piety and religion, we'll see that when  
 5 keeping a promise would be harmful to his state, no ruler can stand by his promises without wickedness. If he sees that a promise he's made is harmful to his state, he can't keep that promise without breaking the promise he made to his subjects, a promise which binds him most firmly, a promise rulers usually undertake most sacredly to honor.

[47] Next, an *enemy* is whoever lives outside the state without recognizing the state's sovereignty, either as an ally or as a subject. For it's  
 10 not hatred which makes an enemy of the state, but right. The state's right against whoever does not recognize its sovereignty by any kind of contract is the same as its right against someone who's done it harm. Indeed, it can rightly compel him, in whatever way it can, either to surrender or to become an ally.

[48] Finally, the crime of *treason* can be committed only by subjects  
 15 *or* citizens, who have transferred all their right to the state, either by a tacit or by an explicit contract. A subject is said to have committed this crime if he has tried in any way to seize the right of the supreme 'power, *or* to transfer it to another.

20 [49] I say "has tried," because if they were not to be condemned until after the deed had been done, for the most part the state would try this too late, after its right had been seized or transferred to another.<sup>19</sup> I say one who tries "in any way" to seize the right of the supreme 'power, without qualification, because I make no distinction between cases where

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19. A bit of political wisdom which Akkerman traces to Sallust's *War with Catiline* lii.

the attempt would clearly harm the whole Republic and those where it would clearly benefit the whole Republic. [50] However [the traitor] tried to do this, he's committed treason and is rightly condemned.

Everyone acknowledges that in war this is done with the most valid right. If someone doesn't maintain his station, but attacks the enemy without his commander's knowledge—even if he's done it with a good plan, and driven the enemy back—so long as he was acting merely on his own initiative, he's still rightly condemned to death, because he's violated his oath and the commander's right.<sup>20</sup>

[51] But not everyone sees equally clearly that all citizens, without exception, are always bound by this same law, though the reason for it is exactly the same. For the Republic must be preserved and directed by the policy of the supreme 'power alone, and the citizens have agreed unconditionally that this right belongs only to the supreme 'power. So if any citizen has undertaken to carry out any public business solely [III/198] by his own decision, without the supreme council's knowledge, he's violated the right of the supreme 'power, has committed treason, and is rightly condemned. As we've said [xvi, 49], it doesn't matter how much advantage this would certainly bring to the state.

[52] To remove any misgiving, it remains now for us to answer this question: isn't it plainly contrary to the revealed divine law to maintain, as we have above [xvi, 6], that anyone in the state of nature who doesn't have the use of reason lives, by the supreme right of nature, according to the laws of appetite? For since everyone is equally bound by the divine command—unconditionally, whether they have the use of reason or not—to love his neighbor as himself, we can't bring harm to another person, and live by the laws of appetite alone, without a violation of right.

[53] We can easily reply to this objection if only we attend to the state of nature. For it's prior, both in nature and in time, to religion. No one knows, by nature,<sup>21\*\*</sup> that he's bound to obey God. This knowledge

20. Spinoza is apparently thinking here of the case of Manlius Torquatus, cited below in xix, 23.

21. \*\*[ADN. XXXIV] When Paul says [Rom. 1:20] that men are without escape, he's speaking in a human manner. For in ch. 9 [Saint-Glavin: v. 18] of the same Letter he explicitly teaches that God has mercy on those on whom he will have mercy, and hardens those he will harden, and that men are inexcusable, not because they've been forewarned, but only because they're in God's power as the clay is in the power of the potter, who makes, of the same mass, one vessel for honorable purposes, another for dishonorable ones.

As for natural divine law, whose chief precept we've said is to love God [iv, 12–14, 21], I've called it a law in the same sense philosophers call laws the common rules of nature, according to which all things happen. For the love of God is not obedience, but a virtue which is necessarily in the man who rightly knows God. Obedience is concerned

- 15 is something he can't acquire by reason at all, but only by revelation, confirmed by signs. [54] So before revelation no one is bound by a divine law he can't help but not know. We mustn't confuse the state of nature with the state of religion, but must conceive it as being without religion or law, and hence without sin or violations of right. We've already done this,<sup>22</sup> confirming our conception by the authority of Paul.
- 20 [55] It's not only because no one knows the divine law in a state of nature that we conceive that state as being prior to revealed divine law, and without such a law. It's also because everyone is born in freedom. If, according to nature, all men were bound by divine law, or if the divine law were a law by nature, it would've been superfluous for God
- 25 to enter into a contract with men and to bind them by an agreement and an oath.<sup>23</sup> [56] So we must grant, without qualification, that divine law began when, in an explicit agreement, men promised God to obey him in everything. By this they, as it were, surrendered their natural freedom, and transferred their right to God, as we've said happens in the civil state. But I'll treat these matters in more detail later.
- 30 [57] Someone may still insist that the supreme 'powers are bound by this divine law just as much as subjects are. We've said, on the contrary, that they retain their natural right, and that by right everything is permitted to them.

This whole difficulty arises not so much because of the state of nature as because of the right of nature. To remove it I say that in the state of nature each person is bound by revealed law in the same  
 [III/199] way he's bound to live according to the dictates of sound reason: it's more advantageous to him and necessary for his salvation. If he doesn't

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with the will of the one commanding, not with the necessity and truth of the matter. Moreover, since we're ignorant of the nature of God's will, and on the other hand, know with certainty that whatever happens, happens only by God's power, it's only by revelation that we can know whether God wills that men should worship him with some honor, as they would a prince.

Moreover, we've shown that the divine laws seem to us to be laws, *or* things instituted, just as long as we do not know their cause. But when this is known, they thereby cease to be laws, and we embrace them not as laws, but as eternal truths. That is, obedience passes into love, which proceeds from true knowledge as necessarily as light does from the sun.

So under the guidance of reason we can love God, but not obey him. For we cannot embrace the divine laws as divine so long as we are ignorant of their cause; and we cannot, by reason, conceive God as establishing those laws like a prince.

22. The reference is apparently to xvi, 6, where Spinoza seems to interpret Paul's teaching differently than he had in iv, 47–50. I take it that ADN. XXXIV is intended to address this *prima facie* inconsistency by recommending a reading of Rom. 1:20 which removes its endorsement of traditional natural law.

23. The issue raised in this section also arises in Hobbes. The covenantal theology of the Pentateuch is not easy to reconcile with the conception of God's sovereignty in the book of Job. I've explored these issues in Curley 2002 and 2004.



want to do this, he's permitted to act at his own risk. [58] So he's only bound to live according to his own decision, not anyone else's, and isn't bound to recognize any mortal as his judge, or as by right the defender of religion.

5 I say that the supreme 'power has retained this right. It can, indeed, consult men, but it is not bound to recognize anyone as a judge, nor any mortal other than itself as a defender of any right, except a Prophet, whom God has expressly sent, and who has shown this by indubitable signs. [59] And not even then is he compelled to recognize the man as judge, but only God himself.<sup>24</sup>

10 But if the supreme 'power doesn't wish to obey the God revealed in his law, he may do this at his own risk and to his own loss, without any conflict with either civil or natural law. For the civil law depends only on his own decree. [60] And the natural law depends on the laws of nature, which are accommodated, not to Religion (which aims only at what is useful to man), but to the order of the whole of nature, i.e.,  
15 to the eternal decree of God, which is unknown to us. Some people seem to have had a conception of this, though rather obscurely, when they maintained that man can, indeed, sin against the revealed will of God, but not against his eternal decree, by which he predetermined all things.<sup>25</sup>

[61] But suppose someone were now to ask: what if the supreme  
20 'power commands something contrary to religion and to the obedience we've promised to God in an explicit covenant? Must we obey the divine or the human command?<sup>26</sup>

I'll discuss these matters in more detail later. Here I'll only say briefly that, when we have a certain and undoubted revelation, we must obey God above all others. [62] But as experience testifies only  
25 too well, men are apt to make great mistakes in matters of religion, and to compete vigorously in inventing many things, according to the differences in their mentality. So it's certain that if no one were bound by law to obey the supreme 'power in the things he thought pertained to religion, then the right of the state would depend on the

24. Like Hobbes, Spinoza is concerned to rule out the possibility that private citizens might seek to challenge the authority of the sovereign because they have a higher obligation to God. Cf. *Leviathan* xxxi, 1; xxxiii, 1; xliii, 1; and the comment on these passages in the preface to my edition of *Leviathan*, xli–xlv. For a recent and useful treatment of the Erastian tradition in early modern political theory, see Nelson 2010.

25. Cf. Thomas (Aquinas) ST I-II, cix–cxiv) and Grotius (*De jure belli* I, i, 10, §2) (Giancotti).

26. A version of the question raised classically in Acts 5:29, where the answer is that we must obey God rather than man. The question is also central for Hobbes. See my introduction to his *Leviathan*, xli–xlv.

30 varying judgment and affect of each person. [63] For no one would be bound by a statute which he judged was contrary to his faith and superstition. So under this pretext everyone could assume a license to do anything.

In this way, the right of the state would be completely violated. From this it follows that the supreme 'power, which, both by divine and by natural law, has the sole responsibility of preserving and protecting the rights of the state, has the supreme right to maintain whatever it judges concerning religion. Everyone is bound to obey its decrees and commands about this matter, according to the assurance they've given to it, which God commands them to honor in every case.<sup>27</sup>

[64] But if those who have the sovereignty are Pagans, we should not enter into any contracts with them, but should resolve to suffer the greatest distress rather than transfer our right to them. And if we have entered into a contract, and transferred our right to them, since we have thereby deprived ourselves of the right of defending ourselves and our religion, we are bound to obey them, and to keep faith, or to be forced to do that—unless by a certain revelation God has promised his special aid against a Tyrant or specifically willed an exception.

10 [65] So we see that of all the Jews who were in Babylon, only three young men, who did not doubt God's aid, were unwilling to obey Nebuchadnezzar [Daniel 3:12]. But with the further exception of Daniel, whom the King himself revered [Daniel 6:15], the rest no doubt obeyed, when they were compelled by the law, perhaps reflecting in their heart that it was in accordance with God's decree that they had been delivered to the King, and that the King held his sovereignty and preserved it by God's guidance.

15 [66] On the other hand, Eleazar [2 Maccabees 6:18–31], while his Country was still standing as best it could, wanted to give his people an example of constancy, so that his followers would be prepared to bear anything rather than allow their right and 'power to be transferred to the Greeks, and would undergo anything so as not to be forced to swear loyalty to the Gentiles.

This is also confirmed by daily experience. [67] For those who rule as Christian sovereigns do not hesitate, for the sake of their greater security, to conclude treaties with the Turks and Pagans, and to command their subjects, who go to live among them, not to assume a greater freedom in their practices, whether secular or religious, than

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27. Perhaps we have an allusion here to Rom. 13:1–7, a text prominently cited as authorizing (unconditional) obedience to the state.

they have explicitly agreed to or than that state has granted. This is  
 25 evident from the agreement of the Dutch with the Japanese, which we  
 have previously spoken about [v, 33].

[III/201]

CHAPTER XVII

*That no one can or need transfer everything  
 to the Supreme 'Power; on the Hebrew Republic  
 during the life of Moses, and after his death,  
 before they elected Kings; on its excellence;  
 why it could perish, and could hardly  
 survive without rebellions*

[1] In the last Chapter we considered the right the supreme 'powers  
 10 have to do everything, and the natural right each person has transferred  
 to them. Though the view expressed there agrees in no small measure  
 with practice, and a practice could be established which approached  
 more and more closely to the condition we described, still, it will  
 never happen that this view does not remain, in many respects, merely  
 theoretical.

[2] No one will ever be able to transfer to another his power, or  
 15 consequently, his right, in such a way that he ceases to be a man. And  
 there will never be a supreme 'power who can get everything to hap-  
 pen just as he wishes. The supreme 'power would act in vain if he  
 commanded a subject to hate someone who had joined the subject to  
 himself by a benefit, or to love someone who had harmed him, or not  
 20 to be offended by insults, or not to desire to be freed from fear, and  
 many other things of this kind, which necessarily follow from the laws  
 of human nature.

[3] I think experience also teaches this very clearly. Men have never  
 surrendered their right and transferred their power to another in such  
 a way that the people who received the right and power from them  
 did not fear them, and that the state was not in greater danger from  
 25 its own citizens than from its enemies (even though those citizens had  
 deprived themselves of their right).<sup>1\*\*</sup>

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1. \*\*[ADN. XXXV] Two common soldiers undertook to transfer the rule of the  
 Roman people, and they succeeded. See Tacitus, *Histories*, I. [*Histories* I, xxv, also cited  
 at TP vii, 14. See also TP vi, 6. ALM call attention to a similar passage in Machiavelli,

[4] Admittedly, if men could be so deprived of their natural right that subsequently they could do nothing, except by the will of those who held the supreme Right, then the latter would be permitted to reign over their subjects most violently and with absolute impunity. But I believe it could never occur to anyone to think that. So it must  
 30 be granted that each person reserves to himself many things of which he remains the master, things which therefore depend on no one's decision but his own.

[5] Nevertheless, to understand rightly how far the right and 'power of the state extend, we must note that its 'power is not lim-  
 [III/202] ited to what it can compel men to do from fear, but extends to absolutely everything it can bring men to do in compliance with its commands. It's obedience which makes the subject, not the reason for the obedience. [6] For whatever reason a man resolves to carry out the commands of the supreme 'power, whether because he fears  
 5 punishment, or because he hopes for something from it, or because he loves his Country, or because he has been impelled by any other affect whatever, he still forms his resolution according to his own judgment, notwithstanding that he acts in accordance with the command of the supreme 'power.

[7] So we must not infer simply from the fact that a man does something by his own judgment, that he does it by his own right,  
 10 and not by the right of the state. For since he always acts by his own judgment and decision—both when he is bound by love and when he is compelled by fear to avoid some evil—if there is to be a state and a right over subjects, political authority must extend to everything which can bring men to decide to yield to it. So whatever a subject does which  
 15 answers to the commands of the supreme 'power—whether he's been bound by love, or compelled by fear, or (as indeed is more frequent) by hope and fear together, whether he acts from reverence (a passion composed of fear and wonder) or is led by any reason whatever—he acts by the right of the state, not his own right.

[8] This is also established as clearly as possible from the fact that  
 20 obedience concerns not so much the external action, as the internal action of the soul. So that person is most under another's control who resolves wholeheartedly to obey all the other's commands. Consequently, that ruler has the greatest authority who reigns over the hearts of his subjects. But if those who were most feared had the greatest authority,

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*Discourses* III, vi, 1. Spinoza will return to this theme in §§8 and 17. Gebhardt places this note in the following sentence, but it seems to attach more logically where I have placed it.]

25 then the subjects of Tyrants would surely have it. For they are most feared by their Tyrants.<sup>2</sup>

[9] Though hearts cannot be commanded in the same way tongues can, still hearts are to some extent under the control of the supreme 'power, which can bring it about in many ways that most men believe, love, and hate whatever it wants them to.<sup>3</sup> [10] Even if these things  
30 don't happen by the direct command of the supreme 'power, still experience abundantly testifies that they often happen by the authority of its power and by its guidance, i.e., by its right. So without any intellectual incoherence, we can conceive men who believe, love, hate, disdain, or are overcome by any kind of affect whatever, solely in accordance with  
[III/203] the right of the state.

[11] In this way we conceive the right and 'power of the state to be ample enough. Still, it will never be so great that those who hold it have an absolute power to do whatever they wish. I believe I've already shown this clearly enough. [12] I've said that I don't intend to show  
5 how a state could be formed so that it might, in spite of everything, always be preserved securely. However, to achieve what I want to, I'll note the things divine revelation once taught Moses to this end. Then we'll consider the development of Hebrew history.<sup>4</sup> From this we'll see the main things the supreme 'powers ought to grant to subjects, for  
10 the greater security and advantage of the state.

[13] Both reason and experience teach, as clearly as can be, that the preservation of the state depends chiefly on the loyalty of its subjects, on their virtue, and on their constancy of heart in carrying out commands. But it's not so easy to see how they must be led so that they  
15 constantly maintain their loyalty and virtue. [14] All men, whether they rule or are ruled, tend to prefer pleasure to difficult work.<sup>5</sup> Those who've experienced how changeable the mentality of the multitude is

2. Cf. the aphorism Spinoza quotes from Antonio Pérez in TP vii, 14: "The use of absolute power is very dangerous for kings, very hateful to their vassals, very offensive to God and to nature, as a thousand examples show" (Pérez 1644, 287).

3. Cf. Quintus Curtius VIII, v, 5–6, where Alexander is described as wishing to be, not only called, but believed to be, the son of Jupiter, "as if he could rule men's minds as well as their tongues" (ALM). Cf. xvii, 22. Spinoza does not claim that rulers are absolutely powerless to control their subjects' beliefs (as Locke does in his *Letter*, p. 69), only that their powers to do this are very limited, that there are certain things rulers cannot try to take from their subjects without (as he puts it in the Preface, §31) "great danger to the state." This view may be influenced by Spinoza's knowledge of the history of the Jews in Iberia. Cf. iii, 54, and the annotation there. Spinoza will return to this theme in xx, 1–5.

4. *Hebraeorum historias et successus*. I accept the suggestion in Akkerman 1997 that this is a hendiadys for "development." As Totaro notes, there's a similar expression in xviii, 6 (Totaro 667, n. 12).

5. An allusion to Terence, *Andria* 77–78. Cf. TP vii, 1.

almost despair about it. They're governed only by affects, not by reason.  
 20 Rushing headlong toward everything, they're easily corrupted either by greed or by extravagant living. [15] Everyone thinks that he alone knows everything, and wants everything to be done according to his mentality. He thinks a thing fair or unfair, permissible or impermissible, just to the extent that he judges it brings him profit or loss. From love of esteem, he disdains equals, and will not put up with being ruled by  
 25 them. From envy for the greater praise or better fortune someone else receives—these things are never equal—he wishes the other person ill, and is delighted when bad things happen to him.

There's no need to go over all this. [16] Everyone knows how it goes—a disgust with the present, a craving to make fundamental changes, uncontrolled anger, a scorn for poverty—these affects lead men to wickedness. Everyone knows how much they fill and disturb men's hearts.

30 To prevent all these things, and to establish the state so that there's no place for fraud—to establish things so that everyone, whatever his mentality, prefers the public right to private advantage, this is the task, this is our concern.<sup>6</sup> [17] Though the necessity of solving this problem has compelled people to invent many solutions, we've never reached the point where a state is not in more danger from its own citizens  
 [III/204] than from its enemies, and where the rulers don't fear their citizens more than their enemies.

[18] Witness the Roman Republic, unconquerable by its enemies, but so often conquered and wretchedly oppressed by its own citizens, particularly in the civil war between Vespasian and Vitellius. On this, see Tacitus, at the beginning of book IV of his *Histories*, where he  
 5 describes how pitiful the city was [after Vespasian defeated Vitellius].<sup>7</sup>

[19] And as Curtius says at the end of book viii, Alexander viewed a formidable reputation in an enemy with fewer qualms than he did one in a citizen. He believed his greatness could be destroyed by his own citizens [but that the greater those he conquered, the brighter would be his own fame].<sup>8</sup> Fearing what his fate might be, he implored his friends to

10 Make me secure from treachery within and domestic plots, and I shall face unafraid the crises of war and of Mars. Philip was safer on the

6. Borrowing, once again, from Vergil's *Aeneid* vi, 129.

7. The civil war between Vespasian and Vitellius occurred in the year of the four emperors, 69 A.D. Book IV of Tacitus' *Histories* begins with a description of the slaughter and looting which followed the defeat of Vitellius.

8. The beginning of this sentence is a virtual quotation from Quintus Curtius VIII, xiv, 46. Spinoza evidently expects his readers to know the passage well enough to complete it, because he ends with an "etc." What I've supplied in brackets completes the quotation.

battlefield than in the theater.<sup>9</sup> Often he avoided the hand of the enemy, but he could not escape that of his own people. If you think about the deaths of other Kings, you will find more killed by their own people than by the enemy.<sup>10\*</sup>

[20] That's why, when Kings assumed the rule in earlier times, to  
15 make themselves secure they tried to persuade people that they were descended from the immortal Gods. They thought that if only their subjects (and everyone else) didn't look on them as equals, but believed them to be Gods, they would easily surrender to them, and willingly submit to their rule.

[21] So Augustus persuaded the Romans that he was descended  
20 from Aeneas, who was believed to be the son of Venus and one of the Gods. He wanted to be worshipped in temples, with sacred images, by flamens and priests.<sup>11\*</sup>

[22] Alexander wanted to be hailed as the son of Jupiter. He seems to have done this as a matter of policy, not out of pride, as his reply to Hermolaus' reproaches indicates:

25 It was almost enough to make me laugh when Hermolaus asked me to reject Jupiter, by whose oracle I'm recognized [as his son]. Are even the answers of the Gods in my 'power? He offered me the name of son. To accept it [note this well] was hardly unhelpful to the affairs we're engaged in. Would that the Indians also believed me to be a God. For wars depend on reputation, and often a false belief has been just as effective as a true one.<sup>12\*</sup>

30 In these few words he shrewdly proceeds to persuade the ignorant that he is what he pretends to be, and at the same time hints at the reason for the pretense.

[23] Cleon also did this in the speech he gave, trying to persuade the Macedonians to flatter the King by agreeing.<sup>13</sup> For after he gave an appearance of truth to the pretense, reciting the praises of Alexander

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9. Where he was assassinated by Pausanias. See Diodorus XVI, lciv, 1-3.

10. \*See Quintus Curtius IX, vi [24-25]. [Spinoza makes his reference to Curtius in the text.]

11. \*Tacitus, *Annals* I, x. [Spinoza makes his reference to Tacitus in the text.]

12. \*Q. Curtius VIII, viii [14-15]. [Spinoza makes his reference in the text. Hermolaus was a young Macedonian nobleman who conspired to assassinate Alexander. When the conspiracy was discovered, Alexander permitted Hermolaus to voice his grievances before having him tortured and executed, along with most of his co-conspirators. See Quintus Curtius VIII, vi-viii. I've added the first bracketed phrase from the Loeb translation, for clarity. The second bracketed phrase is Spinoza's addition, for emphasis.]

13. Cf. Quintus Curtius VIII, v, 5-12. As Curtius describes the events, the purpose of Cleon's speech (and of Alexander's policy) was to get the Macedonians to worship Alexander as a god.



with admiration, and recounting his merits, he proceeded to point out  
[III/205] the utility of this arrangement:

The Persians, in fact, are not only pious, but also prudent to worship their Kings as Gods. For the majesty of the state is the guardian of its safety . . .

And in the end he concludes

when the King goes in to a banquet, I will prostrate my body on the ground. Everyone else ought to do the same, especially those who are wise.

5 [24] But the Macedonians were too prudent for that. Only men who are complete barbarians allow themselves to be deceived so openly and to turn from subjects to slaves, of no use to themselves. But others have had better success than Cleon in persuading men that Majesty is sacred, God's representative on earth, that it has been established, not by men's vote and consent, but by God, and that it is preserved and  
10 defended by God's particular providence and aid.<sup>14</sup> [25] And in this way Monarchs have devised other means to secure their rule, which I'll omit. To get to the conclusions I want to reach, I shall, as I've said, note and weigh only those things divine revelation once taught Moses for this purpose.<sup>15</sup>

15 [26] We've already said in Ch. 5 [§§26–31] that after the Hebrews escaped from Egypt, they were no longer bound by any law to another nation, but were permitted to institute new laws for themselves, as they pleased, and to occupy whatever lands they wanted to. For after they'd been freed from the intolerable oppression of the Egyptians, and were not attached to any mortal by any contract, they regained their  
20 natural right to do anything they could. Each of them could decide again whether he wanted to keep it, or to surrender it and transfer it to someone else.

[27] When they'd been placed in this natural condition, they decided to transfer their right only to God, not to any mortal. That was Moses' advice and they had the utmost trust in him. Without further delay  
25 they all promised equally, in one voice, to obey all God's commands absolutely, and not to recognize any other law except what he would establish as law by Prophetic revelation. [28] And this promise, *or* transfer

14. ALM call attention to a passage in Machiavelli (*Discourses* I, xi; Wootton 1994, 113–16) which makes a similar comment on the political utility of religion. The theme is also present in Hobbes (*Leviathan* xii, 12, 20, 21) and in Livy, an important source for both Machiavelli and Hobbes, as the annotations in the cited editions of their works make clear.

15. Reminiscent of Machiavelli's comment on Moses in ch. vi of *The Prince* (Wootton 1994, 19).

of right, to God, was made in the same way as we've conceived it to be  
 30 done in ordinary society, when men decide to surrender their natural  
 right. For by an explicit covenant and an oath they freely surrendered  
 their natural right and transferred it to God, without being compelled  
 by force or terrified by threats.<sup>16\*</sup>

[29] To make the covenant valid, lasting, and free of any suspicion of  
 deception, God didn't undertake to give anything to them until after they  
 experienced his wonderful power, by which alone they had been preserved,  
 [III/206] and by which alone they could be preserved in the future (see Exodus  
 19:4-5). By the very fact that they believed they could be preserved by  
 the power of God alone, they transferred to God all their natural power  
 to preserve themselves, which previously they perhaps had thought they  
 5 had of themselves. As a result, they transferred all their right.<sup>17</sup>

[30] God alone, then, had sovereignty over the Hebrews. By the  
 force of the covenant this [state] alone was rightly called the Kingdom  
 of God, and God was rightly called also the King of the Hebrews. As  
 a result the enemies of this state [were rightly called] enemies of God,  
 and citizens who<sup>18</sup> wanted to usurp his authority [were rightly held]  
 guilty of treason against God's majesty. And finally, the laws of the state  
 [were rightly called] laws and commands of God.

10 [31] That's why in this state civil law and Religion (which, as we've  
 shown, consists only in obedience to God) were one and the same  
 thing. The doctrines of Religion were not teachings, but laws and  
 commands. Piety was regarded as justice, and impiety a crime and an  
 injustice. Anyone who failed in Religion ceased to be a citizen. For this  
 15 alone he was considered an enemy. Anyone who died for Religion was  
 thought to have died for his Country. Absolutely no distinction was  
 made between civil law and Religion.

[32] For that reason this state could be called a Theocracy.<sup>19</sup> Its  
 citizens weren't bound by any law except the one revealed by God.  
 But all these things consisted more in opinion than in fact. Really the

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16. \*Exodus 24:7. [Spinoza might also have cited Exod. 19:8 and 24:3 (ALM). The question remains why the covenant was necessary when they were transferring their natural rights to a God who by nature has the right to do all things. Cf. xvi, 3, 55.]

17. In §28 Spinoza said that the Hebrews' transfer of right to God was made in the same way as when men decide to surrender their natural right to the social order. In the human case the transfer of right is effected by a transfer of power (xvi, 24-25). It's difficult to see how there can be a transfer of power from man to God, whose omnipotence before the transfer presumably gives him nothing to gain from their surrender. The last two sentences of §29 look like they might be intended to deal with that problem.

18. *Quid* in Gebhardt III/206/8 is a typographical error, corrected silently in ALM.

19. Spinoza is here echoing a passage in Josephus which argued that the constitution of the Jewish state could be called a theocracy because "it placed all authority and sovereignty in God" (*Against Apion* II, 165, cited by ALM).

20 Hebrews retained the right of the state absolutely, as we'll establish in what follows, from the way this state was administered, which I've decided to explain here.

[33] The Hebrews didn't transfer their right to anyone else, but everyone surrendered his right equally, as in a Democracy, and they  
 25 cried out in one voice "whatever God says" (without any explicit mediator) "we will do."<sup>20</sup> It follows that everyone remained completely equal by this covenant, that the right to consult God, and to receive and interpret his laws, was equal for everyone. Everyone held the whole administration of the state equally, without qualification. [34] That's  
 30 why everyone equally went to God the first time to hear what he wanted to command.

But at that first greeting they were so terrified, so stunned by thunder and lightning when they heard God speak, that they thought their end was near. [35] Full of fear, then, they approached Moses again, saying:

[III/207] behold, we have heard God speaking in the fire, and there is no reason why we should wish to die; certainly this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of God again, we shall certainly die; so you go near and listen to everything our God says, and you [not God] shall speak to us; and everything God says to you, we will obey and carry out.<sup>21</sup>

[36] With these words they clearly abolished the first covenant and transferred to Moses, unconditionally, their right to consult God and  
 5 to interpret his edicts. For here they promised to obey, not (as before) whatever God said to them, but whatever he said to Moses (see Deuteronomy 5, after the Decalogue, and 18:15–16).

[37] Moses, then, remained the sole promulgator and interpreter of the divine laws, and hence, also the supreme Judge, whom no one could judge. He was the sole representative of God among the Hebrews, i.e.,  
 10 he had the supreme majesty, since he alone had the right to consult God and to give God's replies to the people, and to compel the people to carry them out. He alone, I say; for if anyone wanted to preach anything in God's name while Moses was alive, even though he was

20. Spinoza is evidently referring to Exod. 19:8 (though similar words recur in Exod. 24:3). Moses does act as a mediator in both instances, but the need for him to play that role is not made explicit until Exod. 20:18–21. The question whether it's possible to make a covenant with God without a mediator was an issue in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, discussed in Curley 2004.

21. Spinoza does not immediately say where this quote comes from, and some editors have assumed that he is continuing to quote from Exodus (specifically, 20:18–21). But as the next paragraph indicates, Spinoza has shifted to the account of the covenant in Deuteronomy 5, quoting vv. 24–27 (with some omissions). These verses make his point more clearly than any of the Exodus passages, none of which says explicitly "everything God says to you we will do" (my emphasis). Cf. also xix, 10.

a true Prophet, he was still guilty of usurping the supreme right (see Numbers 11:28).<sup>22\*\*</sup>

- 15 [38] We should note here that even though the people chose Moses, they could not, by law, choose a successor in his place. As soon as they transferred their right to consult God to Moses, and promised unconditionally to regard him as a divine oracle, they completely lost all right, and were obliged to accept as God's choice whomever Moses chose as  
20 his successor. [39] If he had chosen someone who would have, as he did, the whole administration of the state, i.e., the right to consult God alone in his tent, and hence the authority to make and repeal laws, the right to decide about war and peace, to send ambassadors, establish judges, choose a successor, and administer absolutely all the functions of the supreme 'power, the state would have been nothing more than  
25 a monarchy. There wouldn't have been any other difference [between it and other monarchies] except that generally a monarchic state is governed according to a decree of God hidden even from the Monarch himself, whereas the state of the Hebrews would have been governed (or ought to have been governed) in a certain way by a decree of God revealed only to the Monarch.

- [40] This difference does not diminish the Monarch's dominion and  
30 right over everyone. On the contrary, it increases it. As for the people of each state,<sup>23</sup> each is equally subject and ignorant of the divine decree. For each depends on what the Monarch says and only from that does he understand what is permissible and impermissible. Moreover, the people are not less, but more subject to the Monarch insofar as they believe that he commands nothing but what has been revealed to him by a decree of God.

- [III/208] [41] But Moses chose no such successor. Instead he left the state to be administered by his successors in such a way that it couldn't be called either popular, or aristocratic, or monarchic, but Theocratic. For one person had the right of interpreting the laws and of communicating

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22. \*\*[ADN. XXXVI] In this passage two men are accused of prophesying in the camp. Joshua thinks they should be kept in custody. He would not have done this if everyone had been permitted to give the people divine answers without Moses' command. But it pleased Moses to absolve them of guilt; he reproves Joshua for urging him to press his royal right at a time when he found his right of ruling so wearying that he preferred dying to ruling alone. This is evident from Numbers 11:14[–15], where he replies to Joshua: *Are you hot with anger for my sake? Would that all of God's people were Prophets! I.e., would that the right of consulting God would return to the people, so that the rule would be with them!* So it wasn't that Joshua didn't know what was right, but only that he didn't know what was suitable at that time. That's why Moses chastised him, as David did Abishai when Abishai advised the king to condemn Shimei to death, Shimei being certainly guilty of treason. See 2 Samuel 19:22–23.

23. That is, of the Hebrew, theocratic monarchy, and other monarchies.

God's replies, and another had the right and 'power to administer the  
 5 state according to the laws already explained and the replies already  
 communicated. On this see Numbers 27:21.<sup>24\*\*</sup>

[42] For a better understanding of these matters, I'll explain in an  
 orderly way how the whole state was administered.

First, the people were ordered to build a dwelling-place,<sup>25</sup> which was,  
 as it were, the court of God, i.e., of the supreme Majesty of that state.  
 10 This dwelling-place was to be built, not at the expense of one person,  
 but from the resources of the whole people, so that the dwelling-place  
 where God was to be consulted would be subject to the control of the  
 community.

[43] [Next,] the Levites were chosen as the courtiers and administra-  
 tors of this divine court.<sup>26</sup> Aaron, Moses' brother, was chosen the chief  
 of these and, as it were, second to God the King. The law prescribed  
 that his sons would succeed to his position. As nearest to God, he was  
 15 the supreme interpreter of the divine laws, who gave the people the  
 replies of the divine oracle, and finally, who petitioned God on behalf  
 of the people. [44] If he [Aaron or whichever his successors was the  
 chief priest] had had, along with these [powers of interpreting the  
 law], the right to command [that the laws be obeyed], he would have  
 needed nothing else to be an absolute monarch. But he was barred  
 from this [by Numbers 27:18–21], and the whole tribe of Levi, without  
 exception, was so deprived of the command of the whole community  
 20 that it did not even have its own share [of the land] along with the

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24. \*\*[ADN. XXXVII] The interpreters I've had the chance to see translate vv. 19  
 and 23 of this chapter badly. For Numbers 27:19 and 23 do not mean that he gave him  
 precepts or furnished him with precepts, but that he created or constituted Joshua as  
 the leader. This is common in Scripture. Cf. Exodus 18:23, 1 Samuel 13:15, Joshua 1:9,  
 1 Samuel 25:30, etc. [Saint-Glain has an expanded version of this note, adding: "The  
 more the interpreters strain to render Numbers 27:19 & 23 word for word, the less  
 intelligible they make it. I'm sure very few people understand its true meaning. For  
 most imagine that in vs. 19 God commands Moses to instruct Joshua in the presence  
 of the Congregation, and that in vs. 23 [Moses] lays his hands on [Joshua] and instructs  
 him. They don't note that this way of speaking is very common among the Hebrews  
 to declare that the choice of the leader is legitimate and that he is confirmed in his  
 appointment. This is how Jethro speaks when he advises Moses to choose subordinate  
 judges who would assist him in judging the People: *if you do this* (he says), *then God will*  
*command you*, as if he said that his authority would be firm and that he would be able to  
 last. On this see Exodus 18:23 and 1 Samuel 13:15 and 25:30 and especially Joshua 1:9,  
 where God says to him *have I not commanded you, take courage and show yourself a man of*  
*heart*, as if God said to him *is it not I who have made you the Leader; so do not be afraid of*  
*anything, for I will be with you everywhere.*"]

25. That is, the tabernacle, or mobile dwelling, which the Israelites were instructed  
 to build to serve as a shrine for worship and an oracular source (see Exod. 25–27).

26. Apparently a reference to the establishment of the priesthood in Exod. 27:21–28:5.  
 See the Glossary entry LEVITES.

other tribes, which it would possess by right, and from which it could at least live. But [Moses] established that the tribe of Levi would be fed by the rest of the people, in such a way that it would always be held in greatest honor by the common, ordinary people, as the only tribe dedicated to God.<sup>27</sup>

[45] Next, an army, formed from the rest of the twelve tribes, was  
 25 commanded to invade the domain of the Canaanites, to divide it into twelve parts, and to distribute it to the tribes by lots. For this task twelve leaders were chosen, one from each tribe. These leaders, along with Joshua, and the high priest Eleazar, were given the right to divide the lands into twelve equal parts and to distribute them by lot.<sup>28</sup>

[46] Joshua was chosen supreme commander of this army [Num-  
 30 bers 27:15–21]. He alone had the right to consult God in new matters, but not (as Moses had) alone in his tent, or in the tabernacle. He did this through the high Priest, who alone received God's replies. [Joshua was also granted] the right to establish the commands God communicated to him by the priest, to compel the people to obey them, to devise and use means of carrying them out, to choose from the army as many as he wanted, and whom he wanted, and to send  
 [III/209] ambassadors in his own name. Absolutely every right of war depended only on his decree.

[47] On the other hand, no one succeeded to his post by any legal prescription; his successor was chosen immediately by God; and this happened only when the necessity of the whole people required it. Otherwise all matters of war and peace were administered by the leaders of the Tribes, as I shall soon show.

5 [48] Finally, [God] commanded everyone from age twenty to age sixty<sup>29</sup> to take up arms for military service, and to form armies only from the people, armies which swore loyalty not to the commander, nor to the high priest, but to Religion *or* God. These armies, then, were called the armies *or* hosts of God, and God, among the Hebrews, was  
 10 called the God of hosts. That's why in great battles, on whose outcome either the victory or the defeat of the whole people depended, the ark of the covenant used to go in the middle of the hosts so that the people,

27. On the special rights of the Levites (and the special limitations of their rights), see Num. 27:12–21, 18:8–32, 35:1–8; Deut. 10:8–9, 18:1–8.

28. Numbers 1–2 describes the formation of the army which was to invade Canaan. The directions for the conquest of Canaan and the division of the land occur in Num. 33:50–35:8.

29. In Num. 1:1–3, God commands Moses and Aaron to enroll “every male from twenty years old and upward, everyone in Israel able to go to war,” without specifying that those over sixty are not required to serve. This formula is repeated frequently in Num. 1 and again in Num. 26:2. It's unclear where Spinoza gets his upper limit.

seeing their King, as it were, present among them, would fight with the utmost force.<sup>30</sup>

[49] From Moses' commands to his successors we easily infer that  
 15 he chose administrators, not rulers, of the state. For he gave no one the right to consult God alone and when he wanted to; so he gave no one the authority he himself had of making and repealing laws, deciding concerning war and peace, and choosing administrators both of the temple and of the cities. All these are functions of someone holding sovereignty.

20 [50] For the high priest had the right to interpret the laws and give God's replies, but only when asked by the commander, or the supreme council, or the like, not (as Moses had) whenever he wanted to. On the other hand, the supreme commander of the army and the councils  
 25 could consult God when they wanted to, but could receive God's replies only from the high priest. So in the mouth of the priest God's dictates were not decrees, as they were in Moses' mouth, but only replies. Only when they had been accepted by Joshua and the councils, did they have the force of a command and decree.

[51] Again, this high priest, who received God's replies from God, didn't have an army, and didn't have the command by law. On the other  
 30 hand, those who had the right to possess lands did not have the right to make laws. The high priest—this was as true of Aaron as it was of his son Eleazar—was indeed chosen by Moses. But when Moses was dead no one had the right to choose the priest. As the law prescribed, the son succeeded to the father.<sup>31</sup>

[52] The commander of the army was also chosen by Moses, and he took on the role of commander, not from the right of the high priest,  
 [III/210] but from the right of Moses, given to him. Therefore, when Joshua died, the priest did not choose anyone in his place, nor did the leaders [of the tribes] consult God concerning a new commander, but each one retained Joshua's right over the army of his own tribe, and collectively they had that right over the army as a whole.

[53] It seems there was no need of a supreme commander except  
 5 when they had to fight a common enemy with their combined forces. This in fact happened mainly in the time of Joshua, when they did not yet all have a fixed place and when everything was subject to the control of the community. But after all the tribes divided among themselves the lands they possessed by right of war, and those they were still under

30. See Josh. 3:2–6; 1 Sam. 4:3–11.

31. See Exod. 28:41; Num. 20:25–29, 25:10–13.



10 orders to possess,<sup>32</sup> and everything was no longer everyone's, by that very fact the reason for a common commander ceased, since by that division the different tribes had to be considered not so much fellow citizens as allies. [54] In relation to God and Religion, of course, they had to be regarded as fellow citizens. But in relation to the right one  
 15 had against another, they were only allies, almost in the same way as the Sovereign Federated States of the Netherlands are (if you discount the common temple).<sup>33</sup> For dividing common property into shares is just each person's possessing, alone now, his share, and everyone else's surrendering the right they had to that share.

[55] That's why Moses chose the leaders of the tribes,<sup>34</sup> so that after  
 20 the command was divided each leader would have responsibility for his own share, i.e., the responsibility for consulting God through the high priest about the affairs of his own tribe, for commanding his own army, for founding and fortifying cities, for establishing judges in each city, for attacking the enemy of his own particular state, and of administering all matters of war and peace without exception. Nor were the leaders  
 15 bound to recognize any other judge except God,<sup>35\*\*</sup> or a prophet whom

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32. Cf. Josh. 13:1–7.

33. Gebhardt (V, 96–97) comments that Spinoza here assumes a view of the constitutional arrangements in the Dutch Republic characteristic of the Regents Party. On the complex nature of those arrangements, see the entries under "sovereignty in the United Provinces," in Israel 1995.

34. Num. 34:16–29.

35. \*\*[ADN. XXXVIII] The Rabbis hypothesize that Moses established what they commonly call the Great Sanhedrin. They're not alone in this. Most Christians, as foolish as the rabbis, agree. Moses did, of course, choose seventy assistant judges, who shared with him responsibility for the republic, because he could not bear the burden of the whole people alone [Num. 11:16–17]. But he never made any law establishing a council of seventy men. On the contrary he commanded that each tribe should establish judges in the cities God had given it, who would resolve disputes according to the laws he had given them [Deut. 1:9–18; but cf. Exod. 18:13–27]. And if it happened that the judges themselves were in doubt about the law, they would go to the high priest (who was the supreme interpreter of the laws) or to a judge to whom they were at that time subordinated (for he had the right to consult the priest), so that they might settle the dispute according to the high priest's explanation [Deut. 17:12].

But if it happened that a subordinate judge maintained that he was not bound to give judgment in accordance with the opinion of the high priest, which he had received either from the priest himself or from the supreme 'power, he was condemned to death by the supreme judge, whoever he was at that time, who had made him a subordinate judge. See Deuteronomy 17:9. [This might be] either the supreme commander of the whole people of Israel, as Joshua was, or the leader of one of the tribes (who, after the division, had the right to consult the high priest about the affairs of his tribe, to decide about war and peace, to fortify cities, and to appoint judges, etc.), or the king, to whom some or all of the tribes had transferred their right.

To confirm this I could cite many testimonies from the histories, but of many I shall mention only one, which seems to be the main one. When the Shilonite Prophet chose Jeroboam to be king [1 Kings 11:29–39], he thereby gave him the right to consult the

God had explicitly sent. Otherwise, if he defected from God, the others were obliged, not to judge him as a subject, but to attack him as an enemy who had annulled the assurance of the contract.

[56] We have examples of this in Scripture. When Joshua died, it was  
 30 the children of Israel, not a new supreme commander, who consulted God. When it was understood that the tribe of Judah had to attack its enemy first of all, that tribe alone contracted with Simeon that their combined forces would attack each one's enemy [in turn]. The rest of the tribes were not included in this contract (see Judges 1:1–3), but each one waged war separately against its own enemy (as is related in  
 [III/211] this chapter), and received into subjection and allegiance whomever it wished, even if it had been commanded not to spare anyone, under any condition of a covenant, but to exterminate everyone. Because of this sin they were indeed censured, but no one called them to judgment.<sup>36</sup> It was not for this reason that they began to wage war against one  
 5 another and some began to meddle in the affairs of others.

[57] On the other hand, [the other tribes] attacked the Benjaminites as enemies, because they had offended them and broken the peace accord in such a way that none of their allies could securely have ties of hospitality with them.<sup>37</sup> When the other tribes had done battle with the Benjaminites three times, and were finally victorious, they slaugh-

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high priest and to establish judges, and absolutely every right which Rehoboam kept over his two tribes, Jeroboam obtained over the ten. So Jeroboam could establish the supreme council of the state in his own court with the same right Jehoshaphat could in Jerusalem (see 2 Chronicles 19:8). For it's certain that Jeroboam, insofar as he was king by God's command, was not bound by the law of Moses to stand before Rehoboam as a judge. So neither were his subjects, since they were not Rehoboam's subjects. Much less were they bound to stand before a court in Jerusalem appointed by Rehoboam and subordinate to him.

So in proportion as the Hebrew state was divided, there were many supreme councils in it. Those who do not attend to the varying condition of the Hebrews, but mix their different conditions into one, tangle themselves up in many snares. [For the rabbinic claim concerning the Great Sanhedrin, see *Tractate Sanhedrin* I, 2a. Gebhardt V, 130, cites Grotius (*De imperio summarum potestatum circa sacra*) as an example of a Christian author who accepted the rabbinic theory. For a helpful survey of modern discussions, see Mantel 2007.]

36. The Israelites are censured in Judg. 2:1–5 for making covenants with the Canaanites, violating a commandment given in Exod. 34:11–16. Neither of these passages suggests a command to exterminate the Canaanites, though extermination is commanded in Deut. 20:16–18.

37. See Judges 19. In a story reminiscent of Genesis 19, a Levite from Israel, traveling in Judah with his concubine, is given shelter for the night by an old man. The men of the city, members of the tribe of Benjamin, surround the house, demanding that the Levite be given to them for intercourse. The old man and the Levite offer them the concubine instead, whom they rape and leave to die. Judges 20 describes the vengeance the Israelites took on the Benjaminites. Judges 21 describes their reconciliation with the Benjaminites who survived.

tered everyone alike, the guilty and the innocent, by the right of war.  
 10 Afterward, repenting too late, they grieved at what they had done. [58]  
 These examples completely confirm what we have just said about the  
 right of each tribe.

But perhaps someone will ask: who chose the successor to the leader  
 of each tribe? About this I can infer nothing certain from Scripture  
 15 itself; I conjecture, though, that since each tribe was divided into fami-  
 lies, whose heads were chosen from the elders of the family, the one  
 among these who was senior succeeded by law to the position of leader.  
 [59] For Moses chose from the Elders seventy assistant judges, who  
 formed a supreme council with him [Numbers 11:16–25]; those who  
 had the administration of the state after Joshua’s death are called elders  
 20 in Scripture [Joshua 23:2, 24:1, 31]; and finally, among the Hebrews  
 nothing is more frequent than to understand by elders judges. I think  
 everyone knows this.

[60] But for our purposes it doesn’t much matter whether we can  
 know this with certainty. It’s enough that I’ve shown that after Moses’  
 death no one had all the functions of the supreme commander. These  
 25 things didn’t all depend on the decision of one man, or of one council,  
 or of the people. Some were administered by one tribe, and others by  
 the other tribes, with equal right for each one. From this it follows most  
 clearly that after Moses’ death the state was neither monarchical, nor  
 aristocratic, nor popular, but, as we have said, Theocratic: I) because  
 30 the temple was the royal house of the state and, as we’ve shown, it was  
 the only reason why all the tribes were fellow citizens; II) because all  
 the citizens had to swear allegiance to God as their supreme judge; he  
 was the only one they had promised to obey absolutely in everything;  
 and finally, III) because, when it was necessary to appoint a supreme  
 commander over everyone, only God chose that commander. [61] Moses  
 explicitly proclaims this to the people in the name of God in Deuter-  
 [III/212] onomy 18:15, and the choices of Gideon [Judges 6:11–40], Samson  
 [Judges 13:2–25], and Samuel [1 Samuel 3] are witnesses to it. So we  
 ought not to doubt that the other faithful leaders were also chosen in  
 a similar way, even if the historical narrative concerning these leaders  
 does not establish it.

[62] Now that we’ve explained [what sort of state the Israelites had  
 5 after the death of Moses], it’s time to see how far this way of consti-  
 tuting the state could moderate people’s hearts, and restrain both the  
 rulers and the ruled, so that the ruled did not become rebels and the  
 rulers did not become Tyrants.

[63] Those who administer the state or have the rule always try  
 to cover up whatever crimes they commit under the appearance of

10 legality and to persuade the people that they've acted honestly. They can easily do this when the whole interpretation of the law depends only on them. For there's no doubt that in this way they acquire the utmost freedom to do whatever they want, whatever their appetite urges. On the other hand, if someone else has the right to interpret the laws, they lose that great freedom; the same thing happens if the  
15 true interpretation [of the laws] is so evident to everyone that no one can doubt it.

[64] This makes it clear that giving the whole right to interpret the laws to the Levites (see Deuteronomy 21:5) took a great opportunity for crimes away from the Hebrew leaders. The Levites had no administration of the state and no share [of the land] with the other [tribes]. Their  
20 whole fortune and honor depended on their interpreting the laws truly.

Again, the people as a whole were commanded to gather every seven years in a certain place, where the Priest instructed them in the laws. Moreover, each one was commanded to read and reread the book of the law by himself, continuously and with the utmost attention (see  
25 Deuteronomy 31:9[–13] and 6:7).

[65] So if the leaders wanted the people to cherish and honor them, they had to be very careful (if only in their own interest) to administer everything according to the prescribed laws, and to see that everyone was well aware of this. If they did that, the people would venerate them as the ministers of God's sovereignty and as God's agents. If not, they  
30 could not escape their subjects' greatest hatred. For there is, as a rule, no hatred like Theological hatred.<sup>38</sup>

[66] To these means of restraining the unbridled lust of the Leaders, we may add another which was very important:

[I.] the army was formed from all the citizens (all from age twenty to age sixty, with no exceptions) and the Leaders could not hire any foreign soldiers as mercenaries.

[III/213] [67] I say that this was very important because it's certain that Leaders can oppress the people only with an army to whom they pay a salary, and that they fear nothing more than the freedom of soldiers who are their fellow citizens, who by their excellence, hard work, and readiness to shed their own blood, bring about the freedom and glory of the state.

5 [68] That's why, when Alexander had to fight Darius a second time, and he heard Parmenio's counsel, he didn't reproach Parmenio, who had given the counsel, but Polypercon, who was taking [Parmenio's] side. As Curtius says (IV, xiii, [1–10]), he didn't dare to reprimand

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38. For more on this theme, see below, §§76–81.

Parmenio again, when he had recently criticized him more sharply than he wished [Curtius IV, xi, 10–15], and he could not suppress the  
 10 freedom of the Macedonians—which, as we’ve said [xvii, 19], he was very afraid of—not until after he’d increased the number of soldiers who had formerly been captives far beyond the number of Macedonian soldiers.<sup>39</sup> Then, he was able to indulge his weak character, long restrained by the freedom of the best citizens.

[69] If this freedom of citizen soldiers holds in check the leaders  
 15 of a human state, who are accustomed to take for themselves all the praise for victories, how much more must it have restrained the Hebrew leaders, whose soldiers fought, not for the glory of their Leader, but for the glory of God, and joined battle only when they had received an answer from God.

[70] A second means of restraining the Hebrew Leaders was that

20 [II.] they were all joined only by the bond of religion.

So if any of them defected from their religion and began to violate the divine right of each person, the rest could consider him an enemy and rightly silence him.

[71] A third means of restraint was

[III.] the fear of a new Prophet.

For if someone whose life was provably commendable showed by  
 25 certain accepted signs that he was a Prophet, by that very fact he (like Moses) had the supreme right to command, in the name of a God revealed to him alone, not (like the leaders) in the name of a God consulted only through the priest. [72] There’s no doubt that such men could easily draw an oppressed people to them, and [even] by slight signs persuade them of whatever they wanted to.

On the other hand, if the leader was administering things properly,  
 30 he could take precautions in time. The Prophet would first have to submit to his judgment, so that the leader could examine whether his life really was commendable, whether he had certain and indubitable signs of his commission, and finally, whether what he wanted to say in the name of God agreed with the accepted teaching and ordinary laws of the country. But if either the signs were not sufficient or the teaching  
 [III/214] was new, he could rightly condemn him to death.<sup>40</sup> Otherwise, he was accepted only by the authority and evidence of the leader.

39. See Quintus Curtius X, iii, which describes how, after a mutiny among his Macedonian troops, Alexander entrusted his protection to members of the defeated Persian army.

40. Cf. above, ii, 4–6, citing particularly Deut. 13:1–5. Spinoza has somewhat toughened the requirements for being regarded as a true prophet by emphasizing the leader’s

[73] The fourth means was that

[IV.] the Leader was not superior to the others in nobility or in hereditary right; the administration of the state was his only because of his  
5 age and excellence.

[74] Finally, we note that

[V.] the Leaders and the whole army could be swayed no more by a desire for war than by a desire for peace.

As we've said, the entire army was made up of citizens.<sup>41</sup> So the same men administered both the affairs of war and those of peace. Whoever  
10 was a soldier in the camps was a citizen in civilian life; whoever was an officer in the camps was a judge in the court; and whoever was the commander in the camps was the leader in the state. [75] So no one could desire war for the sake of war, but only for the sake of peace, and to protect freedom. As it happened, the Leader abstained as much  
15 as he could from novelties, so that he would not be obliged to go to the high Priest and stand before him in a way contrary to his dignity.

These are the reasons which kept the Leaders within limits. [76] Now we must see how the people were checked. The foundations of the state show this very clearly. For anyone who attends to them even casually will immediately see that these arrangements had to produce  
20 in the hearts of the citizens a love so special that the hardest thing for them to think of would be betraying their country or defecting from it. On the contrary, everyone had to be moved so strongly that they would suffer death<sup>42</sup> rather than live under foreign rule. [77] After they transferred their right to God, they believed that their kingdom was God's kingdom, that they alone were God's children, and that the other  
25 nations were God's enemies. As a result, they felt the most savage hatred toward the other nations—a hatred they also believed to be pious (see Psalm 139:21–22).<sup>43</sup> Nothing could be more repugnant to them than

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obligation to determine whether the signs of prophecy were sufficient.

41. Machiavelli also favored relying on citizen armies, though on different grounds than Spinoza invokes. Cf. *The Prince* xii–xiii, and *Discourses* II, 20. See also TP vi, 10, and vii, 7.

42. Spinoza uses an idiom here which is found in Virgil's *Aeneid* I, 219 (ALM).

43. The psalm cited expresses hatred of those who hate God: "Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with a perfect hatred; I count them as my enemies." The psalmist does not say explicitly that this hatred is pious. But Maimonides quoted this passage to justify his claim that a Jew is required to hate and destroy anyone who doubts the foundations of the Torah. Cf. Kellner 2004, 16. Some expressions of this attitude may make a modern reader uncomfortable. Ps. 137:8–9 pronounces a blessing on one who pays the Babylonians back for what they did to Israel by seizing their babies and dashing them against the rocks. This issue resurfaces in xix, 29.

swearing loyalty to a foreign power and promising obedience to it. They could imagine nothing more disgraceful or detestable than betraying  
 30 their country, the kingdom of the God they worshipped.

[78] Indeed, they considered it disgraceful even for someone to live outside his country, because they believed that their country was the only place they could practice the worship of God they were always bound to. They considered only that land sacred; they thought the others were unclean and profane. [79] That's why, when David was  
 [III/215] forced to live in exile, he complained to Saul in this manner: *If it is men who incite you against me, they are cursed, because they cut me off from walking in the heritage of God, but say: Go, and worship foreign Gods* [1 Samuel 26:19]. What's especially notable here is that it was also for this reason that no citizen was condemned to exile. For one who sins deserves punishment, indeed, but not disgrace.

5 [80] So the love of the Hebrews for their country was not a simple love, but piety. Their daily worship so encouraged and fed this piety, and this hatred of other nations, that [these affects] had to become a part of their nature. For the daily worship was not only completely different from that of the other nations (which made them altogether individual and completely separated from the others), but also absolutely contrary  
 10 to it. [81] That daily condemnation [of foreigners] had to produce a continual hatred; no other hatred could be lodged more firmly in their hearts than this. As is natural, no hatred can be greater or more stubborn than one born of great devotion *or* piety, and believed to be pious. And they did not lack the usual cause which invariably inflames  
 15 hatred more and more: its reciprocation. For the other nations were bound to hate them most savagely in return.

[82] Reason teaches as clearly as possible how much all these things—freedom from human dominion, devotion to their country, an absolute right in relation to all others, a hatred not only permitted, but even pious, regarding everyone as hostile, the particularity of customs and rites—reason, I say, teaches, and experience itself has been a witness,  
 20 how much all these things would strengthen the hearts of the Hebrews to bear everything with special constancy and virtue, for the sake of their Country. While the city was standing, they could never endure being under the rule of a foreign power. That's why they frequently called Jerusalem the rebellious city (see Ezra 4:12, 15).

25 [83] Though the second state, after the Priests took for themselves the right to rule,<sup>44</sup> was hardly a shadow of the first, it was very difficult for the Romans to destroy it. Tacitus gives evidence of this in his *Histories*:

44. Cf. below at xvii, 113.



30 *Vespasian had broken the back of the Jewish war, except for the siege of Jerusalem, a task made harder and more troublesome because of the mentality of the people and the persistence of their superstition than because adequate forces were available to the besieged for the difficulties they had to endure* (II, 4).

[84] But beyond these factors, whose evaluation depends only on opinion,<sup>45</sup> there was something else very unyielding in this state, which must have been the most important factor to prevent its citizens from thinking of defection or wanting to desert their country: the principle of advantage, the mainstay and life of all human actions. That force was [III/216] exceptionally strong in this state. [85] Nowhere did the citizens possess their property with a greater right than did the subjects of this state, who, with the leader, had an equal share of the lands and fields.<sup>46</sup> Each one was the everlasting lord of his own share. If poverty compelled 5 anyone to sell his estate or field, it had to be restored to him once again when the jubilee year came.<sup>47</sup> They instituted other similar practices, so that no one could be alienated from his real property.

[86] Nowhere could poverty be more bearable than where the people had to cultivate, with the utmost piety, loving-kindness toward their 10 neighbor (i.e., toward their fellow citizens), so that God, their King, would favor them. The Hebrew citizens could prosper only in their own country; outside it they faced great harm and dishonor.

[87] Something else helped greatly, not only in keeping the people in their native country, but also in avoiding civil war and removing 15 causes for dispute: no one was subject to his equal; everyone was subject only to God, and loving-kindness and love toward one's fellow citizen were valued as the height of piety. The hatred they had for other nations, which other nations reciprocated, encouraged this in no small measure.

45. A suggests (502, n. 19) that Spinoza has in mind specifically the opinion of Tacitus, who accepts a theory that different nationalities have different mentalities which Spinoza will not accept. See below §§93–94. But Spinoza seems to have in mind the several factors enumerated in §82, not just the one in §83.

46. Spinoza's language has suggested to some translators that each of the subjects had a share of the land equal to the leader's, but it seems unlikely that Spinoza intended this. I can find no passage in Scripture which supports it. Totaro cites several examples indicating that in ancient Israel the king was expected to possess more than his subjects. See Totaro 687, n. 114. The system of land distribution did aim at a kind of equity, but what that seems to have meant was that initially land was distributed to tribes, and within the tribes to clans and households, in proportion to their size. See Num. 26:52–56; Josh. 13–21; and ABD III, 1025–30. (The tribe of Levi was an exception.) There were injunctions against the king's exalting himself above other members of the community, but these seem to be intended mainly to prevent his possessing too many wives and horses (Deut. 17:14–20).

47. On the Jubilee year, see Lev. 25:8ff. and the analysis in ABD III, 1025–30.

[88] Especially conducive [to promoting loyalty to their country] was the extreme training in obedience they were brought up with. They were obliged to do everything according to a definite legal prescription. They  
 20 weren't permitted to plow as they pleased, but only at certain times and in certain years, and only with one kind of animal at a time.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, they could only sow and reap in a certain way and at a certain time.<sup>49</sup> Without exception their life was a continual cultivation of obedience. (On this see Ch. 5, concerning the use of Ceremonies [§§30–31].) [89] To those who had become completely accustomed to it, this regime must  
 25 have seemed no longer bondage, but freedom. The inevitable result was that no one desired what was denied, but only what was commanded.

To achieve this it seems to have been quite helpful that at certain times of the year they were bound to devote themselves to leisure and joy, not to obey their heart, but to obey God from the heart. [90] Three times a year they had a feast in the presence of God (see Deuteronomy  
 30 16[:16]); on the seventh day of the week they had to stop work and devote themselves to leisure [Exodus 35:1–3]; in addition, other times were designated at which honorable acts of joy and feasts were not just granted, but commanded. I don't think anything more effective can be devised for steering people's hearts in a certain direction. Nothing wins hearts more than the joy which arises from devotion, i.e., from  
 [III/217] love and wonder together. [91] They couldn't easily be wearied by the familiar practice of these things, because the worship designated for festive days was rare and varied.

To this we have to add their extreme reverence for the temple, a reverence they always preserved most scrupulously because of the special  
 5 worship conducted there and the things they were bound to observe before anyone was permitted to go there. To this day they can't read without great horror about Manasseh's disgraceful conduct, how he dared to place an idol in the temple itself [2 Kings 21:3–9].

[92] The people also had no less reverence for the laws, which were kept most scrupulously in the inmost sanctuary. So there was no need at  
 10 all to fear murmuring and prejudices among the people. No one dared to make a judgment about divine matters. They were obliged to obey, without ever consulting reason, in everything they were commanded to do, on the authority of a divine answer received in the temple or of a law established by God.

With this I think I have explained the guiding principle of this state clearly enough, even if briefly.

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48. Perhaps a reference to Deut. 22:10 (Totaro).

49. Perhaps a reference to Deut. 22:9 (Totaro).

15 [93] Now we must ask why the Hebrews so often failed to obey the law, why they were so often subjugated, and why, in the end, their state could be completely destroyed.

Perhaps someone will say that this happened because the people were stiff-necked. But this is childish. Why was this nation more stiff-necked than others? Was it by nature? Surely nature creates individuals, not  
 20 nations, individuals who are distinguished into nations only by differences of language, laws and accepted customs. [94] Only the latter two factors, laws and customs, can lead a nation to have its particular mentality, its particular character, and its particular prejudices.<sup>50</sup> So if we have to grant that the Hebrews were more stiff-necked than other  
 25 mortals, we must ascribe that either to a vice of the laws or to a vice of the accepted customs.

[95] And of course this much is true: if God had wanted their state to be more stable, he would have established its rights and laws differently, and set up another way of administering it. So what else can  
 30 we say, except that they made their God angry, not only (as Jeremiah says, in 32:31) from the establishment of the city, but ever since the establishment of the laws.

[96] Ezekiel (20:25[–26]) also testifies to this, saying

*Moreover, I gave them statutes which were not good, and laws by which they would not live, for I defiled them with their own gifts, by rejecting everything which opened the womb (i.e., the first-born), so that I might destroy them, that they might know that I am Yahweh.*<sup>51</sup>

50. As Bennett observes, Spinoza tacitly dismisses language as playing any role in the formation of national character. This is surprising given what he had said in vii, 15.

51. Atypically, Spinoza does not give us the Hebrew of the passage he translates here, and Akkerman calls his translation of a key phrase “completely inaccurate” (A 502, n. 22). Indeed, it’s difficult to see how Spinoza gets this translation out of the Masoretic text, which modern translations generally render quite differently. For example, the NJPS translation reads: “I gave them laws that were not good and rules by which they could not live. When they set aside every first issue of the womb, I defiled them by their very gifts—that I might render them desolate, that they might know that I am the LORD.” (A note suggests the possibility of emending the text so that it would have “guilty” instead of “desolate.”) ALM observe that Spinoza may be influenced by Tremellius’s Latin translation (772, n. 76). Totaro has a similar, but more extended, discussion (690–91, n. 126).

I take the central issue about the passage in Ezekiel to be whether the prophet represents God as saying that he commanded the people of Israel to sacrifice their first-born children to him, or whether Ezekiel merely says that at some point the Israelites (incorrectly) thought he had issued such a command. Exod. 13:1–2 and 22:28–29 might be regarded as loci of such a command, but the interpretation of these passages is controversial. Akkerman seems to favor a negative answer to the first question (citing Lev. 18:21–30), and an affirmative answer to the second (citing Ezek. 20:31). He might also have cited Jer. 19:4–6 in favor of this position.

Akkerman’s reading of Ezekiel would probably be dominant among biblical scholars. See, for example, Anchor Ezekiel, 368–69. However, I find Levenson’s arguments

To better understand these words, and the reason for the destruction  
 [III/218] of the state, we must note that [God's] first intention was to hand over  
 the whole of the sacred ministry to the first-born, not to the Levites (see  
 Numbers 8:17). [97] But after everyone except the Levites worshipped  
 the calf [Exodus 32:25–29], the first-born were rejected and defiled, and  
 5 the Levites were chosen in their place (Deuteronomy 10:8).

The more I consider this change, the more it compels me to burst  
 out in the words of Tacitus: at that time God's concern was not with  
 their security, but with vengeance [see Tacitus, *Histories* I, 3]. I cannot  
 wonder enough that there was so much anger in the heavenly heart<sup>52</sup>  
 that he established the laws, which always aim only at the honor, well-  
 10 being and security of the whole people, with the intention of taking  
 vengeance on and punishing the people—so that the laws seemed not  
 to be laws, i.e., the salvation of the people, but rather penalties and  
 punishments. [98] For all the gifts they were obliged to give the Levites  
 and priests, as well as the fact that they had to redeem the first-born  
 and give money to the Levites on a per capita basis [Numbers 3:44–51],  
 15 and finally, the fact that only the Levites were permitted to approach  
 the sacred things [Numbers 16:9–10]—all these things continuously  
 accused them of defilement and rejection.

[99] Again, the Levites constantly had something to reproach them  
 with. Doubtless among so many thousands [of Levites] there were  
 many troublesome, foolish Theologians. As a result the people were  
 20 anxious to keep an eye on the deeds of the Levites—who were, after  
 all, men—and as happens, to accuse them all because of one's offense.  
 So there was continual murmuring, and a weariness with feeding men  
 who were idle, envied, and not related to them by blood (especially  
 when food was expensive).

[100] What is so strange, then, if in times of tranquillity, when evi-  
 dent miracles stopped, and there were no men of the most meticulous  
 25 authority, the people's spirit, angered and niggardly, began to lose its  
 resolve, so that finally they failed in their loyalty to a form of worship

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persuasive: though Ezekiel regards the sacrifice of the first-born as an abomination, he nevertheless asserts that God commanded it, because this suited his larger purposes. (See Levenson 1993, ch. 1.)

What I find most striking about Spinoza's treatment of this text is that he doesn't seem to think it has anything to do with the question of child sacrifice. From his translation and subsequent discussion, it looks as though he thinks Ezekiel did not say that God commanded the sacrifice of the first-born (understanding Exod. 34:20 to call instead for their redemption). He seems to take the bad laws Ezekiel attributes to God to be those rejecting the first-born as priests, and establishing the Levites in their place. This does not seem to be the most natural reading of the text.

52. An allusion to Vergil, *Aeneid* I, 11 (Wernham).

which, although divine, had still been discredited among them and was suspect, and desired a new worship? What is so strange if the Leaders, to get the supreme right of command exclusively for themselves, constantly sought ways to bind the people to themselves, and turn them from the high Priest, and so granted the people everything and  
 30 introduced new forms of worship?

[101] But if the Republic had been constituted in accordance with [God's] first intention, the right and honor would always have been equal among all the tribes, and everything would have been arranged most securely. For who would wish to violate the sacred right of their own blood-relatives? What else would they prefer to feeding their own blood-relatives, brothers and parents, from Religious piety? and to being taught the interpretation of the laws by them? and finally, to  
 [III/219] waiting for divine answers from them?

[102] Next, in this way—that is, if the right of administering sacred affairs had been equal among all the tribes—they would have remained much more closely united. Indeed, even if the Levites had been chosen to administer sacred matters, there would have been nothing to be feared,  
 5 provided that choice had a cause other than anger and vengeance. But as we've said, they had angered their God, who (to recall again the words of Ezekiel [20:25]) defiled them with their own gifts, rejecting everything which opened the womb, in order to destroy them.

[103] Moreover, the historical narratives themselves confirm this. As soon as the people began to flourish in tranquillity in the desert,  
 10 many men, not from the ordinary people, began to be bitter about this choice, and from this they took the occasion to believe that Moses had instituted nothing by divine command, but had done everything according to his own pleasure, because he'd chosen his own tribe before all others, and had given the right of priesthood to his own brother forever. With a great commotion, they approached him claiming that  
 15 everyone was equally holy and that he was unjustly raised above everyone else.<sup>53</sup> [104] He could not quiet them in any way, but when he used a miracle as a sign of his good faith, all the rebels were annihilated [Numbers 16:31–35]. This gave rise to a new and general rebellion

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53. Spinoza is referring to the revolt described in Numbers 16, which initially involved two hundred and fifty Israelite men, said in 16:2 to be “leaders of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men” (NRSV) or “chieftains of the community . . . men of repute” (NJPS). It is unclear in the text just who is rebelling and for what reason. Modern scholars generally attribute this to an editor's attempt to combine different traditions. In one members of the formerly dominant tribe of Reuben were struggling to regain their leadership; in the other members of the tribe of Levi who were not Aaronids were protesting the special position of the Aaronid priesthood. For discussion see Kugel 2007, 330–34. The annotation in HCSB is also helpful.

of the whole people [Numbers 16:41–50], who believed that the first rebels had been annihilated, not by God's judgment, but by Moses's cunning. He finally quieted them after they had been worn out by a  
 20 great calamity or plague, but in such a way that they all preferred death to life. So at that time it was more that the rebellion had ended than that harmony had begun.

[105] Scripture is a witness to this in Deuteronomy 31:21, where God, after predicting to Moses that after his death the people would defect from divine worship, says this to him: *for I know the appetite of this people, and what it is planning today, when I have not yet led it to*  
 25 *the land I swore* [to give to it]. A little later [31:27] Moses says to the people: *for I know your rebelliousness and your stubbornness. If you have been rebels against God while I lived among you, how much more will you be rebels after my death.*

[106] And that's what happened, as everyone knows. That's why there were great changes, and a great license to do anything, and extravagant  
 30 living, and negligence, with everything going from bad to worse, until, having often been subjugated, they completely broke away from the divine law, and wanted a mortal king [1 Samuel 8:4–5], so that the royal house of the state would not be the Temple, but the court, and so that the tribes would all remain fellow citizens, not any longer in virtue of divine law and the priesthood, but in virtue of the Kings' law.

[107] This greatly encouraged new rebellions, and led in the end to the complete ruin of the state. For nothing is more intolerable for  
 [III/220] a King than ruling at someone else's pleasure and allowing a state within a state.<sup>54</sup> The first [kings], chosen from the private citizens, were content with the degree of dignity to which they had risen.<sup>55</sup> [108] But after their sons took possession of the rule by right of succession, they began to gradually change everything, so that they alone would hold  
 5 the whole right of command. For the most part they lacked this so long as the right over the laws did not depend on them, but on the high Priest, who guarded the laws in the sanctuary and interpreted them to the people. They were bound by the laws, as their subjects were, and could not legally repeal them or make new laws with equal authority.

[Other factors encouraging rebellions:] The law of the Levites treated  
 10 both the Kings and their subjects as profane, and prohibited them equally

54. *imperium in imperio*. Gebhardt (V, 99–100) notes the frequent occurrence of this expression in politico-religious controversies in the seventeenth century, citing (among others) passages from Hobbes and De la Court, where the issue is whether religious authorities within a state are juridically independent of the political authority. It occurs in a different context in E III Pref. and TP ii, 6.

55. Referring to Saul and David (ALM).

from administering sacred matters. Moreover, the whole security of [the king's] rule depended only on the will of one person, who was seen as a Prophet. [The people] had seen examples of [the king's dependence on the will of a Prophet]: the great freedom Samuel had to give orders to Saul about everything, and how easily Samuel could transfer the right to rule to David because of one instance of wrongdoing.<sup>56</sup> So they had

15 a state within a state, and ruled at someone else's pleasure.

[109] To overcome these obstacles, then, they permitted other temples to be dedicated to the Gods, so that there would be no further consultation with the Levites.<sup>57</sup> Next, they sought out a number of people who would prophesy in the name of God, so that they might have Prophets whom they could oppose to the true Prophets.<sup>58</sup>

[110] But whatever they tried to do, they could never be granted their  
20 wish. For the Prophets, who were prepared for everything, waited for an opportune time: the rule of a successor (which is always precarious as long as the memory of his predecessor is strong). Then they could easily use their divine authority to induce someone hostile to the King and renowned for his virtue to defend divine right and to take legal control of the state, or of a part of it.

25 [111] But the Prophets weren't able to make any progress in this way. For even though they removed a Tyrant from their midst, nevertheless, the causes [of tyranny] remained. So all they accomplished was to buy a new Tyrant at the cost of much citizen blood.<sup>59</sup> There was no end to dissension and civil wars. In fact, the causes for violations of divine right were always the same. The only way they could be removed was  
30 by removing the whole state from their midst at the same time.

[112] So now we see how Religion was introduced into the Hebrew Republic, and how its sovereignty could have been everlasting, if the just anger of the lawgiver had permitted it to stay the same. But because this could not happen, in the end it had to perish.

I've spoken here only about the first state. [113] The second<sup>60</sup> was  
[III/221] hardly a shadow of the first, since [the Hebrew people] were subjects

56. Presumably the one instance of wrongdoing is Saul's failure to completely exterminate the Amalekites, as commanded by God in 1 Sam. 15:3. Samuel transfers the rule from Saul to David in 1 Sam. 16:13.

57. See 1 Kings 12:26–32 (ALM).

58. Perhaps a reference to the prophets of Baal and Asherah who opposed Elijah in 1 Kings 18.

59. ALM note a strikingly similar passage in De la Court, I, 32, p. 113.

60. See the Glossary entry *SECOND STATE*. Spinoza here gives an account of the Second Temple Period whose brevity makes it somewhat misleading. He jumps from the era of Persian rule to the revolt of the Maccabees, without mentioning the intervening Hellenistic period. The biblical sources themselves are rather sketchy. See 1 Macc. 1, helpfully annotated in HCSB. Spinoza's source for the high priest Simon's assumption



of the Persians, and bound by Persian law. After they acquired their freedom, the High Priests took for themselves the right to rule, by which they obtained absolute control. This created among the Priests an intense desire to rule and to attain the high priesthood. [114] So  
 5 there was no need to say more about the second state.

But whether the first, insofar as we've conceived it to be durable, can be imitated, or whether it's pious to imitate it as much as possible, will be evident from what follows. [115] Here I should like to note only, as a kind of conclusion, what we have already hinted at above: the things we have shown in this Chapter establish that divine right,  
 10 or the right of religion, arises from a covenant, without which there is only natural right. So the Hebrews weren't bound by a religious command to any piety toward nations which weren't participants in a covenant with them; they were bound in that way only toward their fellow citizens.

[III/221]

## CHAPTER XVIII

*Certain Political doctrines are inferred  
 from the Republic and history of the Hebrews*

[1] Though the Hebrew state, as we've conceived it in the preceding Chapter, could have lasted forever, nevertheless no one can imitate  
 20 it now. Nor is this even advisable. Whoever wanted to transfer their right to God would have to make an explicit covenant with God, as the Hebrews did. So not only would the will of those transferring their right be required, so also would that of God, to whom the right would have to be transferred.<sup>1</sup> [2] God, however, has revealed through his Apostles that his covenant is no longer written with ink, or on stone tablets, but  
 25 written on the heart, by the spirit of God.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, such a form of state could be useful, perhaps, only for those who are willing to live by themselves, alone, without any foreign trade, shutting themselves up within their own boundaries, and segregating themselves from the

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of absolute power is probably 1 Macc. 14:25–49, an event not covered in Josephus, his other main source for this history. His verb for that act is *usurpare*, which I do not here (or in §83) translate by “usurp,” for reasons explained in the Glossary.

1. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan* xiv, 23, and xviii, 3. I have discussed this and other Hobbesian passages related to the covenant with God in Curley 2004.

2. An allusion to Paul, 2 Cor. 3:3.

rest of the world. It couldn't be at all useful for those to whom it's necessary to have dealings with others. So it could be useful only for a very few people.

[3] Though [the form of this state] can't be imitated in every respect, still, it had many excellent features, which are at least well-worth noting, and perhaps imitating. Because my intention, as I mentioned [xvi, 36–37; xvii, 12], is not to treat a Republic in detail, I'll put most of [III/222] those things to one side and note only those which serve my purpose:

First, it is not contrary to God's Kingship to choose a supreme majesty which has the supreme right of command.

[4] For after transferring their right to God, the Hebrews handed over the supreme right of command to Moses. So he alone had the authority to make and repeal laws in God's name, to choose the ministers of sacred affairs, to judge, to teach, to punish, and to command absolutely all things to all people. [5]

Second, though the ministers of sacred affairs were the interpreters of the laws, it was still not their function to judge the citizens or to excommunicate anyone.

This was only in the jurisdiction of the judges and the leaders chosen from the people (see Joshua 6:26, Judges 21:18, and 1 Samuel 14:24).<sup>3</sup>

[6] In addition to these points [about the form of the state], if we attend to the course of Hebrew history, we'll find others also worth noting, e.g., that

I. there were no sects in their Religion until after the high Priests in the second state had the authority to make [religious] decrees and to handle the affairs of the state.

3. Though Spinoza was himself subjected to a proceeding, *cherem*, commonly referred to as excommunication, what that term referred to in the Amsterdam Sephardic community was rather different from what "excommunication" has normally meant in Christian communities. And *cherem* has a very different meaning in the biblical context. For discussion, see the Glossary entry EXCOMMUNICATION. As ALM note, Spinoza here takes a position on issues controversial in the Protestant milieu of his day. Calvin, for whom excommunication was an important means of church discipline, regarded this as a spiritual power, residing in the church, and completely separate from the right of the sword (*Institutes* IV, xi, 5). But he also assumed that in Christian societies the civil government had a duty "to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church . . . [and] to form our social behavior to civil righteousness" (*Institutes* IV, xx, 2). For helpful discussion, see Höpfl 1982. Hobbes thinks the Jews practiced excommunication only after the Babylonian captivity (*Leviathan* xlii, 20 [OL]). He granted that by commission from Jesus Christian pastors had the power to excommunicate, but argued that without the assistance of the civil power, excommunication "is without effect, and consequently, ought to be without terror" (xlii, 31).

To make this authority permanent, they took for themselves the right to rule, and in the end wanted to be called Kings.

[7] The reason [why sects arose after the priests acquired this authority] is easy to see. In the first state no [religious] decree could derive its validity from the high Priest, since they had no right to make [religious] decrees, but only to give God's answers when asked to do so by the rulers or the councils. And for that reason they could not then have any itch to decree novelties, but only to administer and defend familiar and accepted decrees. The only way they could safely preserve their own freedom when the rulers were opposed to them was to preserve the laws uncorrupted. [8] But after they had acquired the 'power to handle the affairs of the state, and had joined the right to rule to that of priesthood, each one began to seek the glory of his own name both in religion and in other matters, determining everything by priestly authority and daily issuing new decrees, concerning ceremonies, the faith, and everything else, decrees they wanted to be no less sacred and to have no less authority than the laws of Moses. [9] The result? Religion declined into a deadly superstition and the true meaning and interpretation of the laws was corrupted.

Another reason: while the priests were trying to get the rule at the beginning of the restoration, to get the ordinary people on their side they gave lip service to everything, approving what the ordinary people did, even if it was impious, and accommodating Scripture to their worst customs. [10] Malachi testifies to this in the most explicit terms: after he reproached the priests of his time,<sup>4</sup> calling them men who despise God's name [Malachi 1:6], he proceeds to criticize them as follows:  
 5 *The priest's lips keep 'knowledge safe, and the law is sought from his mouth, because he is God's messenger; but you have departed from the path, and have made the law a stumbling-block for many; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the God of hosts* [Malachi 2:7–8]. And so he goes on to charge them with interpreting the laws as they pleased, and taking no account of God, but only of persons.

10 [11] But certainly the High Priests were never able to do this so discreetly that the wise did not notice it. So they<sup>5</sup> claimed, with growing boldness, that they were not bound by any laws except written ones.

4. Malachi's time seems to have been the period shortly before Nehemiah's return, c. 445 B.C.E. (HCSB 1284). So Spinoza is now talking about an earlier period than the one following the Maccabees' revolt. This seems to be the only place in the Hebrew Bible where the priests are described as God's messengers.

5. The reference of the pronoun is disputed. Some have thought it possible, and perhaps clear, that Spinoza is accusing the *high priests* of growing boldness. In that case we might wish to translate *crescente audacia* by "growing impudence (or audacity)." Cf. ALM, 776; Totaro, 698; Silverthorne-Israel, 232. But I think Shirley was right to take the reference

Otherwise it was not at all obligatory to observe the decrees the Pharisees mistakenly called traditions of their forefathers. As Josephus says in his *Antiquities*, the Pharisees had their support mainly from the ordinary people.

15 [12] However that may be, we cannot have any doubt that the flattery of the Priests, and the corruption of religion and of the laws, and the incredible increase in the number of laws gave a very great and frequent opportunity for arguments and disputes, which could never be settled. For where men begin to argue with the fierce heat of superstition, and the magistrate aids one or the other side, they can never be  
20 calmed, but must be divided into sects.

[13] The second point worth noting is that

II. the Prophets, as private men, aggravated people more than they corrected them by the freedom with which they warned, reproached, and censured  
25 them. On the other hand, when these same people were warned or criticized by their Kings, they were easily set right.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, the Prophets were often intolerable even to pious Kings because of the authority they had to judge what it would be pious or impious to do, and even to criticize the Kings themselves, if they were bold enough to treat some public or private business in a way which conflicted with the judgment of the Prophets.

30 [14] King Asa, who, according to the testimony of Scripture, reigned piously [2 Chronicles 14:2, 1 Kings 15:14], put the Prophet Hanani in prison (see 2 Chronicles 16[:10]) because he dared to censure and reproach him freely for the pact he made with the King of Aramaea. Moreover, there are other examples which show that religion derived more harm than good from such freedom [to criticize], not to mention that the Prophets' retention of so much right for themselves was  
[III/224] a source of intense civil wars.

[15] It's also worth noting that

III. so long as the people had sovereignty, they had only one civil war. And even  
5 it was completely stamped out. The winners took such pity on the losers that they were careful to restore them to their former status and power.<sup>7</sup> But after the people, who were by no means accustomed to kings, changed the first form of the state into a monarchical one, there was hardly any end to civil wars, and they engaged in battles so fierce that they surpassed the reputation of all others.

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to be to "the wise." It helps to understand this passage if we realize that the passage in Josephus Spinoza cites is *Antiquities* XIII, x, 6, and not (*pace* Gebhardt et al.) XVIII, i, 3.

6. Spinoza will return to this point in xix, 45, as part of his argument for secular control of religion (ALM).

7. Spinoza is presumably referring to the war against the Benjaminites, discussed above (xvii, 57).

10 [16] In one battle—this is almost beyond belief—the men of Judah killed five hundred thousand men of Israel;<sup>8</sup> in another, the men of Israel slaughtered many men of Judah (Scripture does not say how many), seized the King himself, almost destroyed the wall of Jerusalem, and (to show that there was no limit to their anger) completely plundered  
15 the Temple itself. Loaded down with enormous spoil taken from their brothers, their thirst for blood satisfied, they took hostages, left the King in a kingdom already almost destroyed, and put down their arms, made secure not by the good faith of the men of Judah, but by their weakness [2 Chronicles 25:21–24].

[17] A few years later, when the men of Judah had rebuilt their  
20 strength, they went to war again; and again the men of Israel were the winners, slaughtering a hundred and twenty thousand men of Judah, taking up to two hundred thousand of their women and children captive, and again seizing a great many spoils [2 Chronicles 28:5–15]. Exhausted by these and other battles, related casually in the histories, in the end they fell prey to their enemies.

25 [18] Next, if we want to consider the times when they were permitted to enjoy absolute peace, we'll find a great difference. Before they had kings, they often passed forty years [Judges 3:11, 5:31, 8:28]—and once eighty years [Judges 3:30], a greater period than anyone might have expected—harmoniously, without any war, either external or internal. [19] But after Kings got sovereignty, we read that they all waged wars—because people had to fight for glory,<sup>9</sup> and not (as before) for  
30 peace and freedom. The only exception was Solomon, whose virtue, wisdom, could show itself better in peace than in war. Moreover, the deadly lust to rule generally made the path to the throne very bloody.

[20] Finally,

IV. while the people's rule lasted, the laws remained uncorrupted and were observed more constantly.

[III/225] For before the kings there were very few Prophets who warned the people. But after a King was chosen,<sup>10</sup> there were many at the same time. Obadiah, for example, delivered a hundred prophets from slaugh-

8. According to 2 Chron. 13:17. The Chronicler's numbers do strain credulity. HCSB notes that the total of all U.S. casualties in World War II was about four hundred thousand. IB comments (III, 342–43) that Chronicles "exaggerates numbers and amounts out of all possibility . . . it is not history in our sense of the word at all." This may be one reason for the hostility toward Chronicles expressed at x, 2.

9. Echoing a theme from the Preface, §10.

10. A decision vigorously opposed at the time by Samuel (1 Sam. 8). Hobbes' discussion of Samuel's diatribe against monarchy in *Leviathan* xx, 16, makes it an explanation of the rights of kings.

ter, and hid them so that they would not be killed with the others [1 Kings 18:4, 13]. And we don't see that the people were ever deceived by false Prophets until after they gave sovereignty to kings, whom most  
5 of them were eager to flatter by agreeing.

[21] Moreover, the people, whose spirit is generally either confident or humble, depending on how things are going,<sup>11</sup> easily corrected itself in disasters, turned to God, and revived the laws. In this way it extricated itself from every danger. The kings, on the other hand, whose spirit was  
10 always equally elevated and could not be altered without disgrace, clung stubbornly to their vices right up to the final destruction of the city.

[22] From this account we see very clearly:

i) how ruinous it is, both for religion and for the Republic, to grant the ministers of sacred affairs the right to make [religious] decrees or to handle the business of the state; and how much more stable everything  
15 is if these people are held in check, so that they don't give any answers except when asked, and in the meantime teach and put into practice only doctrines which have already been accepted and are very familiar.

[23] [Secondly, we also see clearly]

ii) how dangerous it is to make purely speculative things a matter of  
20 divine right and to make laws concerning opinions, which people usually debate about, or can debate about.

For that government which makes it a crime to hold opinions—which each person has a right to hold, a right no one can surrender—is the most violent of all. Indeed, when this happens, what rules most is the anger of the mob.

[24] So Pilate, to defer to the anger of the Pharisees, ordered Christ to be crucified, though he knew him to be innocent.<sup>12</sup> And the Pharisees, to  
25 dislodge the rich from their positions of status, began to raise questions about religion, and to accuse the Sadducees of impiety.<sup>13</sup> Following the Pharisees' example, the worst hypocrites, stirred up by the same madness (which they call zeal for divine right), have everywhere persecuted men

11. ALM note an echo of Terence's *Mother-in-law*, 380. We might also recall the Preface, §§1–3.

12. Spinoza accepts what the gospels seem agreed on: Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus. Cf. Matt. 27:11–26; Mark 15:1–15; Luke 23:1–25; John 18:28–19:16. Nowadays this topic is controversial, as a comparison of Brown 1994 with Crossan 1996 will demonstrate. See also Letter 67, IV/287/30–35.

13. ALM (followed by Totaro) cite two passages from Josephus as a likely source for this claim about the conflict between Pharisees and Sadducees: *The Jewish Wars* II, 8, and *The Antiquities of the Jews* XVIII, 1. Neither passage seems to me quite satisfactory support for the historical claim Spinoza is making here.

distinguished for their integrity, famous for their virtue, and on that account, envied by the mob—publicly denouncing their opinions and  
 30 inflaming the savage multitude in their anger against them.<sup>14</sup>

[25] It's not easy to restrain this impudent license, because the deceptive appearance of religion masks it. This is especially true when the supreme 'powers have introduced some sect, in which they themselves do not hold a position of authority.<sup>15</sup> Then they're not thought of as the interpreters of divine right, but as the followers of a sect, i.e., as people who recognize the learned men of that sect as interpreters of  
 [III/226] divine right. That's why the authority of the magistrates about these matters is usually not worth much with the mob, whereas the authority of the learned, to whose interpretations they think even kings must submit, is very great.

[26] To avoid these evils, then, the safest thing for the Republic is to locate piety and the practice of Religion only in works, i.e., only in  
 5 the practice of loving-kindness and justice, and for the rest, to leave everyone's judgment free. But more of this later [xx, 30–32, 42–46].

[27] [Thirdly,] we see

iii) how necessary it is, both for the Republic and for religion, to grant the supreme 'powers the right to distinguish between what is permissible and what is not.

10 For if this right to distinguish concerning deeds could not be conceded to the divine Prophets themselves without great harm both to the Republic and to Religion, much less should it be conceded to those who do not know how to predict the future and cannot perform miracles. But I'll discuss this in detail later.<sup>16</sup>

[28] Finally, we see

15 iv) how fatal it is to choose a Monarch when the people are not accustomed to live under kings, and have laws already established.

For the people will not be able to bear so much control, and the royal authority will not be able to allow the laws and rights of the

14. Zac (1965, 163n.) argues that Spinoza here has in mind the persecution of the Remonstrants by the Counter-Remonstrants, calling attention to the discussion of the controversy coming up in xx, 41.

15. *cujus ipsae auctores non sunt*. Some have translated this as “of which they themselves were not the authors/founders.” This is possible linguistically, but if Spinoza is thinking of the Remonstrant controversy, the translation in the text seems more likely.

16. The terms here translated “permissible” (*fās*) and “impermissible” (*nefās*) in the statement of the third point, make it clear that Spinoza intends the sovereign's authority to extend to questions of religious right and wrong. His Erastianism has already been announced in xvi, 57ff., and will be developed further in the next chapter.



people to be established by someone else of lesser authority. Much less will the royal authority consider defending them, especially because in establishing them no thought could have been given to the King, but  
 20 only to the people or the council which thought it had the rule. So if the King defended the former rights of the people, he would seem to be its slave, rather than its master. [29] A new Monarch will strive, with the greatest eagerness, to establish new laws, to transform the rights of the state to his own advantage, and to reduce the people to the point where it cannot take status away from the Kings as easily as it gave it.<sup>17</sup>  
 25 [30] But here I can't ignore the fact that

[v] it's also no less dangerous to remove a Monarch from your midst, even if it's clear in every way that he's a tyrant.<sup>18</sup>

For a people accustomed to royal authority, and held in check only by that authority, will disdain a lesser authority and mock it. So if the people removes one monarch from their midst, they will have to choose  
 30 another in his place (as long ago the Prophets had to).<sup>19</sup> And this new monarch will be a tyrant, not because he wants to, but because he must. [31] For how can he look at the hands of the citizens, stained with blood from murdering a king, and see them glorying in their assassination, as in a deed well done, when they have done it only to set an example for him. If he wants to be a King, and does not want to acknowledge the people as the judge of Kings, and his master, or to  
 [III/227] rule at their pleasure, he must avenge the death of his predecessor and set a contrary example for his own benefit, so that the people will not dare to commit such a crime again. [32] But he will not easily be able to avenge the death of the tyrant by killing citizens unless at the same time he defends the cause of the former tyrant, endorses his deeds, and  
 5 so follows completely in the footsteps of the former tyrant.

That's how it happens that the people can often change the tyrant, but can never destroy him, or change a monarchic state into another, of a different form.<sup>20</sup> [33] The English people have given us a deadly

17. Gebhardt notes that Spinoza's observations here are aimed at the monarchical ambitions of the Orangist party (V, 101). His analysis is reminiscent of Machiavelli's *Prince* v (or *Discourses* I, 26). Cf. TP v, 7.

18. Gebhardt notes similar observations in Machiavelli (*Discourses* I, 16, III, 6) and refers us also to TP v, 7, as showing that Spinoza was aware of the similarity (V, 101). Droetto/Giancotti has a helpful treatment of the discussion of tyrannicide in Bodin (*Republic* II, 5), Grotius (*De jure* I, iv), and Hobbes (*Leviathan* xviii).

19. Cf. xvii, 110.

20. An allusion to a slogan in Van Hove 1661, I, iii, 1 (p. 232): *mutatio tyranni non tyrannidis ablatio*, changing the tyrant does not take away the tyranny. Spinoza will cite this motto again in TP viii, 9 (Wernham).

example of this truth, when they sought reasons for removing a monarch from their midst with an appearance of right.<sup>21</sup> When they had removed him, they were completely unable to change the form of the state. After much blood had been spilled, they reached the point where they hailed a new monarch under another name, as if the whole issue had only been about the name! The new monarch could survive only if he completely destroyed the royal family, killed the king's friends, or anyone suspected being his friend, and upset the tranquillity of peace, so suitable for generating murmurings, with a war, so that ordinary people, preoccupied with new crises, would turn its thoughts about royal murder in a different direction. [34] Too late the people realized that the only thing they had accomplished for the well-being of their country was to violate the right of a legitimate king and change everything for the worse. So as soon as they could, they decided to retrace their steps; they did not rest until they saw things restored to their original condition.<sup>22</sup>

[35] Perhaps someone will object that the example of the Romans shows that a people can easily remove a tyrant from their midst.<sup>23</sup> I myself, however, think this example completely confirms our opinion. For though the Roman people were far more easily able to remove a tyrant from their midst and to change the form of the state—they themselves had the right to choose the king and his successor, and they had not yet become accustomed to obeying kings—rebellious and infamous men, they killed three of the six kings they had before—still all they accomplished was to elect a number of tyrants in place of one, tyrants who always had them torn apart wretchedly by both external and

21. At the end of the English Civil War the victorious parliamentary leaders tried and beheaded Charles I in 1649. During a period of ineffective rule by a Parliamentary Council, Cromwell, the leader of the army during the war, gradually took control, assuming the title of Lord Protector in 1653 but rejecting the title of king.

22. Once again Spinoza invites comparison with Machiavelli (e.g., in *Discourses* III, 4). But his account of British history in the period after the execution of Charles seems rather misleading. Cromwell survived without destroying the royal family, whose heir returned to the throne in 1660. He did have to put down royalist revolts in Ireland and Scotland, and the war in Ireland was especially bloody. But he died of natural causes in 1658, and was succeeded by his son, who might have ruled longer had he possessed his father's ability. The war against the Dutch in this period seems to have been motivated primarily by conflicts over trade and a concern that the Dutch not interfere in British politics, not by a desire to distract the people with new crises. (See Firth 1947, Ch. 18) Gebhardt has an interesting discussion (V, 101–3) of the sources which may have helped to form Spinoza's judgment: De la Court's *Polityke Weegschaal*, and a Dutch translation (*Historie van zijn Majesteyt, Karel de II*) of an 'ultramonarchist' English history of the period.

23. Here Spinoza differs from Machiavelli, who held (*Discourses* I, 17) that the Roman people were easily able to get rid of tyrants when (as under the Tarquins) the people were not yet corrupt, but that after the deaths of Caesar, Caligula, and Nero, the people were too corrupt to return to freedom. ALM have instructive annotation.

internal wars, until in the end the state gave way again to a monarchy, changed only in name, as in England.<sup>24</sup>

[36] As for the States of Holland, so far as we know they never had Kings, but only counts, to whom the right to rule was never transferred.

[III/228] For as the Sovereign States of Holland themselves made generally known in the document they published at the time of the count of Leicester,<sup>25</sup> they have always reserved for themselves the authority to remind the counts of their duty, and retained for themselves the 'power to defend this authority of theirs and the freedom of the citizens, to  
5   avenge themselves on the counts if they degenerated into tyrants, and to check them in such a way that they could accomplish nothing without the permission and endorsement of the states. [37] From this it follows that the states always had the right of supreme majesty, a right the last count tried to usurp.<sup>26</sup> So by no means did they fail in their duty to  
10   him when they restored their original state, which had almost been lost.

These examples completely confirm what we have said:

[vi] that the form of each state must necessarily be retained and that it cannot be changed without a danger that the whole state will be ruined.

These are the things I thought worth noting here.

24. Apparently a reference to the fact that Augustus was called *princeps* rather than *rex*, and Cromwell *Lord Protector* rather than *King*.

25. In 1575, the States General of the emerging Dutch Republic offered sovereignty over the Netherlands to Queen Elizabeth, in return for England's assistance in the revolt against Spain. Elizabeth declined to accept sovereignty, but did offer aid, on the condition that her nominee, Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, be the military and political leader of the Republic, with the title of "governor-general," and that England be allocated seats in the Council of State. Though this arrangement lasted only until 1587, Israel (1995, 220) has described it as "a formative episode in the history of the Dutch Republic." The document Spinoza refers to, "A Short Exposition of the rights exercised by the knights, nobles and towns of Holland and West Friesland," was first published in 1587, and republished in 1650 by Van den Enden (ALM). Gebhardt quotes most of it (V, 104–8). Kossman and Mellink provide an English translation of the whole document (Kossman and Mellink 1974, 274–81).

26. The reference is to Philip II of Spain (Gebhardt V, 109). For more on this, see TP ix, 14, and the annotation there. Grotius had argued for the sovereignty of the States in his *De antiquitate Reipublicae Batavicae* (ALM), on which see Israel 1995, 421–22.

[III/228]

## CHAPTER XIX

*That the right concerning sacred matters  
belongs completely to the supreme 'powers,  
and that the external practice of Religion  
must be accommodated to the peace of the Republic,  
if we want to obey God Rightly*

[1] When I said above that only those who have sovereignty have a  
20 right to do all things, and that all law depends solely on their decree,  
I meant not only civil law, but also sacred law. For they must be both  
the interpreters and the defenders of this law also. I want to note this  
explicitly here, and to treat it in detail in this Chapter, because a great  
many people flatly deny that this right concerning sacred matters  
25 belongs to the supreme 'powers, and don't wish to recognize them as  
the interpreters of divine law.<sup>1</sup> [2] That's why they assume for them-  
selves a license to censure them, to expose them to scorn, and even to  
excommunicate them from the Church (as Ambrose once did to the  
emperor Theodosius).<sup>2</sup> But in doing this they divide the sovereignty.

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1. Early in the seventeenth century the Dutch Republic was torn apart by a bitter controversy between the Remonstrants and the Counter-Remonstrants. The primary issue involved questions of grace and predestination, but the parties also disagreed over the proper role of the state in religious matters, with the Remonstrants advocating the state's authority in the appointment of ministers, the calling of synods, and the resolution of religious disputes, and the Counter-Remonstrants advocating a policy which gave the church the right to operate independently of the state. In evaluating Spinoza's support for the Remonstrant position it's important to realize that both parties accepted the status of the Dutch Reformed Church as the publicly supported religion of the Republic, membership in which was required of those holding public office. The difference was that the Remonstrants did not wish, as their opponents did, to require strict adherence to Calvinist teachings for the ministers and members of the church. See Israel 1995, 421–32; Nelson 2010, ch. 3; and Voogt 2009.

2. According to a story in de Voragine's thirteenth-century *Legenda aurea* (kept alive in seventeenth-century paintings by Rubens and Van Dyck), in 390 Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, refused communion to Theodosius until the emperor did penance for the massacre of five thousand rebellious citizens in Thessalonica. In fact, it seems, this is indeed a legend. On that occasion Ambrose behaved more diplomatically. (See Drake 2000, 441–48.) The story conflates what happened in 390 with an incident in 388 when a mob, led by the local bishop and a group of monks, destroyed a synagogue in Calinicum. Theodosius ordered that the rioters be punished, and the bishop be made to pay for rebuilding the synagogue. Ambrose challenged this order, arguing that it was no crime to burn a synagogue (“a site of perfidy, a house of impiety, a refuge of madness, which God himself has condemned”) and that it would violate the offenders' religious

Indeed, they're looking for a way to become sovereign themselves, as  
 30 we'll see later in this Chapter.

First, though, I want to show that Religion receives the force of law only from the decree of those who have the right to rule, that God has no special kingdom over men except through those who have  
 [III/229] sovereignty, that Religious worship and the exercise of piety must be accommodated to the peace and utility of the Republic, and hence, must be determined only by the supreme 'powers, who must also be its interpreters.

[3] Note that I'm speaking specifically about the exercise of piety and about the external practice of religion, not about piety itself and  
 5 the internal worship of God, *or* the means by which the mind is disposed, internally, to worship God wholeheartedly.<sup>3</sup> For (as we showed at the end of Chapter 7) each person is his own master with respect to the internal worship of God and piety itself. He cannot transfer that control to anyone else.

[4] Furthermore, I think what I understand here by God's Kingdom  
 10 is established sufficiently by Chapter 14. For there we showed that a person fulfills God's law if he practices justice and loving-kindness according to God's command. From this it follows that God's Kingdom exists wherever justice and loving-kindness have the force of law and of a command. [5] I see no difference here whether it's by the natural light or by revelation that God teaches and commands the true practice  
 15 of justice and loving-kindness. It doesn't matter how that practice is revealed, so long as it obtains the supreme right and is the supreme law for men.

[6] Suppose I now show that justice and loving-kindness can acquire the force of law and of a command only from the right of the state. Then since the right of the state belongs only to the supreme 'powers,  
 20 it will be easy for me to conclude that Religion acquires the force of law only by the decree of those who have the right to rule, and that God has no special kingdom over men except through those who have sovereignty.

[7] That the practice of justice and loving-kindness acquires the force of law only from the right of the state is evident from what we've said above. For we've shown in Chapter 16 that in the state of nature

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liberty if they were made to rebuild the synagogue. This was his ground for refusing the emperor communion. See Ambrose 2005, 95–123. Calvin approved Theodosius' act of submission, though it's unclear that Ambrose's action met his criteria for legitimate excommunication. Cf. *Institutes* IV, xii, 7, with IV, xi, 6.

3. A standard Erastian qualification of the state's rights in matters of religion. See Grotius 1647, III, 1; and Hobbes, *Leviathan* xxvi, 41; xl, 2; xlii, 11.

reason has no more right than appetite, but that both those who live  
 25 according to the laws of appetite and those who live according to the  
 laws of reason have the right to do whatever they can. [8] That's why  
 we couldn't conceive of sin in the natural state, nor of God as a judge  
 punishing men for their sins, but could only conceive that all things  
 30 proceed according to laws common to the whole of nature, that (as  
 Solomon puts it)<sup>4</sup> the same outcome happens to both the righteous  
 and the impious, the pure and the impure, and that there is no place  
 there for justice or for loving-kindness. But for the teachings of true  
 reason, i.e. (as we showed in Chapter 4, concerning the divine law),  
 the divine teachings themselves, to have the force of law absolutely, it  
 [III/230] was necessary for each person to surrender his natural right, and for  
 everyone to transfer it either to everyone, or to some, or to one. Not  
 till then did we come to know what justice and injustice, equity and  
 inequity were.

[9] Justice, then, and all the teachings of true reason, without excep-  
 5 tion (and hence, loving-kindness toward one's neighbor), acquire the  
 force of law and of a command only by the right of the state, i.e. (by  
 what we showed in the same Chapter), only by the decree of those  
 who have the right to rule. And because (as I've already shown) God's  
 kingdom consists only in the law of justice and loving-kindness, *or* of  
 true Religion, it follows, as we claimed, that God has no kingdom over  
 10 men except through those who have sovereignty.

It doesn't matter, I say, whether we conceive Religion to be revealed  
 by the light of nature or by the Prophetic light. [10] For the demon-  
 stration is universal, since religion is the same, and has equally been  
 revealed by God, no matter what way we suppose that men become  
 aware of it. So even for Prophetically revealed religion to have the  
 15 force of law among the Hebrews, it was necessary for each of them to  
 surrender first his natural right, and for everyone to resolve, according  
 to a common agreement, that they would obey only those commands  
 which were revealed to them Prophetically by God, in exactly the same  
 way as we have shown happens in a democratic state where everyone  
 resolves, by a common agreement, to live only according to the dictate  
 20 of reason.<sup>5</sup> [11] And though the Hebrews in addition transferred their

4. A recurring theme in Ecclesiastes (e.g., 2:14b–15, 7:15, 8:14, 9:1–3), whose attribution to Solomon Spinoza typically accepts, though in x, 5, where he might have been expected to discuss the question of authorship, he does not defend the attribution. Perhaps he prefers to leave the traditional attribution standing because he wants to invoke, in favor of potentially controversial propositions he wishes to see accepted, the authority of a king noted for his wisdom.

5. Cf. xvii, 33–36. Both Exod. 19:7–8 and Deut. 5:27 represent the covenant at Mount Sinai as involving the people's promising obedience.

right to God, they could do this more in thought than in deed. For really—as we’ve seen above [xvii, 32–36]—they retained the right of command absolutely until they transferred it to Moses. After that he remained king absolutely and only through him did God reign over the Hebrews.

- 25 [12] Again, the fact that religion acquires the force of law only from the right of the state also explains why Moses was not able to inflict any punishment on those who violated the Sabbath before the covenant, and hence, while they were still their own masters (see Exodus 16:27). After the covenant (see Numbers 15:36), i.e., after each person surrendered  
30 his natural right, the Sabbath acquired the force of a command from the right of the state.

[13] Finally, this is also the reason why revealed Religion ceased to have the force of law when the Hebrew state was destroyed. For we can’t have any doubt that as soon as the Hebrews transferred their right to the King of Babylon, God’s kingdom and the divine right immediately ceased. [14] For by that act they completely abolished the covenant by which they had promised to obey God in everything he told them to  
[III/231] do. This had been the foundation of God’s kingdom. They could no longer stand by that covenant, because from that time on they were no longer their own masters (as they had been in the wilderness or in their own land), but were under the control of the King of Babylon,  
5 whom they were bound to obey in everything (as we showed in Ch. 16).

Jeremiah also explicitly warns them of this: “Take thought for the peace of the city to which I have led you as captives,” he says, “for its welfare will be your welfare” (Jeremiah 29:7).<sup>6</sup> [15] Because they were captives, they couldn’t look after the peace of that city as ministers of  
10 state, but only as slaves,<sup>7</sup> by showing themselves to be obedient in all things, to avoid rebellions, and by observing the rights and laws of the

6. The Jewish people have often taken Jeremiah’s letter to the captives in Babylon (Jer. 29:4–23) as a guide to their proper conduct in the Diaspora. Cf. SC, Jer. 29:4ff. Jeremiah, though, prophesied an exile limited to seventy years, not permanent exile. Zac (1965, 159; 1979, 149) argued forcefully that Spinoza takes the passage in Jeremiah out of context, that it does not show that the covenant with God was abolished when the people went into captivity, or that they were obliged to change their religion in their new state. Calvin used this text to defend an apparently unconditional duty of obedience to kings, even if they were “abominable and cruel tyrants” (ALM, citing Calvin, *Institutes* IV, xx, 27–28).

7. The Latin term used here, *servus*, is ambiguous between “slave” and “servant.” Though Spinoza clearly thinks of the Babylonian captives as slaves here, it’s not equally clear that he’s right to do so, given his definition of slavery in xvi, 32–33. The SC comment on Jer. 29:5 points out that “the exiles in Babylon did not suffer the restrictions . . . imposed upon Jews in many countries in later times. They were permitted to own land and engage in agriculture.”



state, even if they were very different from the laws they had become accustomed to in their own country, etc.

[16] From all these considerations it follows most clearly that among the Hebrews Religion acquired the force of law only from the right of the state. Once the state was destroyed, [religion] could no longer  
 15 be considered the command of a particular state, but only a universal teaching of reason. “Of reason,” I say, for Universal Religion had not yet come to be known from Revelation. [17] We infer, then, without qualification, that, whether religion is revealed by the natural light or by the Prophetic light, it acquires the force of a command only by the decree of those who have the right to rule, and that God has no  
 20 special kingdom over men except through those who have sovereignty.

[18] This also follows, and is understood more clearly, from what we said in Ch. 4 [§§22–37]. For there we showed that all God’s decrees involve eternal truth and necessity, and that God cannot be conceived as giving laws to men like a prince or a lawgiver. [19] Hence, the divine  
 25 teachings, whether revealed by the natural light or by the Prophetic light, don’t get the force of a command directly from God, but must get it from (or by the mediation of) those who have the right to rule and make decrees. It’s only by their mediation that we can conceive God as reigning over men and directing human affairs according to justice and equity.

30 This is also confirmed by experience itself. [20] We don’t find any traces of divine justice except where the just rule. Otherwise (to repeat again the words of Solomon),<sup>8</sup> we see that both the just and the unjust, the pure and the impure, get the same result. Indeed, this has caused doubts about divine providence among a great many people who thought that God reigns directly over men and directs the whole of nature to  
 [III/232] their use.

[21] Therefore, since both experience and reason establish that divine law depends only on the decree of the supreme ‘powers, it follows that they must also be its interpreters. We’ll now see in what way this is true. It’s time for us to show that external religious worship and every  
 5 exercise of piety must be accommodated to the peace and preservation of the republic, if we want to obey God properly. Once we’ve demonstrated this, we’ll easily understand how the supreme ‘powers are the interpreters of religion and piety.

[22] It’s certain that piety toward a person’s country is the supreme  
 10 piety he can render. For if the state is destroyed, nothing good can remain, but everything is at risk. Only anger and impiety rule, and

8. Eccles. 9:2, previously cited in vi, 33, and xix, 8.

everyone lives in the greatest possible fear. From this it follows that you can't do anything pious to your neighbor which doesn't become impious if some harm to the republic as a whole follows from it. Conversely, you can't do anything impious to anyone which shouldn't be ascribed  
 15 to piety if it's done to preserve the republic.<sup>9</sup>

[23] So, if someone quarrels with me and wants to take my tunic, it's pious to give him my cloak also [Matthew 5:40, Luke 6:29]. But when one judges that this is harmful to the preservation of the Republic, it is, on the contrary, pious to call him to judgment, even if he's to be condemned to death. That's why Manlius Torquatus is honored: because  
 20 he valued the well-being of the people more than piety toward his son.<sup>10</sup>

[24] Since this is so, it follows that the well-being of the people is the supreme law.<sup>11</sup> All laws, both human and divine, must be accommodated to this. But since it's the duty of the supreme 'power alone to determine what's necessary for the well-being of the whole people  
 25 and the security of the state, and to command what it has judged to be necessary, it follows that it's the duty of the supreme 'power alone to determine in what way each person must devote himself to his neighbor in accordance with piety, i.e., in what way each person is bound to obey God.

30 [25] From these considerations we understand clearly in what way the supreme 'powers are the interpreters of religion, and again, that no one can obey God rightly if he does not accommodate to the public advantage the practice of piety by which everyone is bound, and hence, if he does not obey all the decrees of the supreme 'power. [26] For since we are bound by God's command to cherish everyone, without exception, in accordance with piety, and to harm no one, it follows that no one is permitted to aid one person at the expense of another, much less  
 [III/233] at the expense of the whole state. So, in keeping with God's command, no one can cherish his neighbor in accordance with piety, unless he accommodates piety and religion to the public advantage. [27] But no private person can know what is useful to the republic except by the decrees of the supreme 'powers, who are the only ones whose job it is  
 5 to treat public business. Therefore, no one can practice piety rightly, nor obey God, unless he obeys all the decrees of the supreme 'power.

9. Agreeing with Machiavelli, *Discourses* III, 41 (ALM).

10. Manlius Torquatus here is Titus Manlius Imperiosus Torquatus, who was a consul in 340 B.C.E., and had his son executed for disobeying orders in battle (Cicero, *De finibus* I, vii, 23). Wernham cites Livy VIII, vii. ALM note that his example was cited also in Sallust (*Catiline* 9 and 52), Valerius Maximus II, vii, 6, and De la Court, *Politieke Discoursen*, 60. To this list we may add Machiavelli, *Discourses* III, 22 and 34.

11. Cf. xvi, 34. By the seventeenth century, this Ciceronian maxim had become a commonplace of political theory (endorsed by, among others, Hobbes in *Leviathan* xxx, 1).

[28] This is also confirmed by practice. For if the supreme 'power has judged someone punishable by death or an enemy—whether a citizen or a foreigner, a private person or someone who has command  
 10 over others—it is not permissible for any subject to give aid to that person. So though the Hebrews were told that each person should love his neighbor as himself (see Leviticus 19:17–18), nevertheless they were bound to inform the Judge of anyone who had broken the law (see Leviticus 5:1 and Deuteronomy 13:8–9),<sup>12</sup> and to kill him if he was  
 15 judged to be punishable by death (Deuteronomy 17:7).

[29] Again, for the Hebrews to be able to preserve the freedom they had acquired, and have absolute control over the lands they occupied, it was necessary (as we've shown in Ch. 17 [§§76–81]) for them to adapt religion only to their own state, and to separate themselves from the other nations. Therefore it was said to them: *love your neighbor and hate*  
 20 *your enemy* (Matthew 5:43).<sup>13</sup> [30] But after they lost their sovereignty and were led into captivity in Babylon, Jeremiah taught them to look after the welfare (even) of that city to which they had been led as captives.<sup>14</sup> And after Christ saw that they were to be dispersed throughout the whole world, he taught them that they should treat absolutely everyone  
 25 with piety. All these things show, with utmost clarity, that religion was always adapted to the advantage of the republic.

[31] Suppose someone asks now “By what right could Christ's disciples, who were private men, preach religion?” I say they did this by right of the 'power they'd received from Christ over unclean Spirits  
 30 (see Matthew 10:1). [32] At the end of Ch. 16, I explicitly warned that everyone is bound to keep faith even with a Tyrant, except someone to whom God, by a certain revelation, had promised special aid against the Tyrant. So no one is allowed to take this as an example, unless he also has the 'power to perform miracles. This is also clear from the  
 [III/234] fact that Christ told his disciples that they shouldn't fear those who kill the body (see Matthew 10:28). [33] If he'd said this to everyone,

12. Deut. 13:8–9 does not seem good support for the point Spinoza is making here. It is concerned not with law-breaking in general, but with incitement to idolatry, and prescribes, not merely reporting the offender, but killing him (or her). Deut. 17:7 also seems to be concerned with idolatry (the act itself, not mere incitement).

13. Arguably it's problematic to cite New Testament criticism of the Old Testament as an authority on the OT teachings. There's no problem finding OT evidence that the Hebrews were commanded to love their neighbors (including resident aliens and strangers). See Leviticus 19:17–18, 19:34, Deut. 10:18–19. The problem, as ALM note, is to find a passage in which the Hebrews were commanded to hate their enemies. But it would appear that Spinoza thought there were passages in the Psalms which encouraged hatred of other nations. See xvii, 77, and the annotation there. Deut. 30:6–7 seems similar in spirit.

14. Jer. 29:7, discussed above in §§14–15.

the state would be established in vain, and that saying of Solomon—*my son, fear God and the king* (Proverbs 24:21)—would have been impious.

- 5 That's far from true. So it must be confessed that the authority Christ gave his disciples he gave to them only, and that others cannot take them as an example.

[34] I won't pause to discuss the arguments of my opponents,<sup>15</sup> by which they claim to separate sacred right from civil right, and contend that the supreme 'power possesses only the latter, whereas the universal  
10 church possesses the former. Those arguments are so frivolous they don't deserve to be refuted. [35] One thing, though, I can't pass over in silence: how wretchedly they're deceived when they try to confirm this seditious opinion (if I may be excused for speaking rather harshly)<sup>16</sup> by appealing to the example of the high Priest of the Hebrews, who previously possessed the right of administering sacred matters—as if  
15 the Priests had not received that right from Moses. As we've shown above, he kept the supreme authority for himself alone, and they could also be deprived of that right by his decree. [36] For he himself chose not only Aaron, but also his son, Eleazar, and his grandson, Phinehas, and gave them the authority to administer the priesthood.<sup>17</sup> Afterward  
20 the Priests kept this authority, but in such a way that they seemed to be representatives of Moses, i.e., of the supreme 'power. For as we've already shown [xvii, 38], Moses did not choose any successor to the sovereignty, but distributed all his functions so that his successors seemed to be his deputies, who were administering the state as if the king were absent, not dead.

- 25 [37] In the second state the Priests held this right absolutely, after they had acquired the right to rule along with the priesthood. So the right of the priesthood always depended on the edict of the supreme 'power, and the Priests didn't have the right of priesthood unless they also had the right to rule. [38] Indeed, the right concerning sacred matters was absolutely in the possession of the Kings (this will be evident from what I'll say shortly, at the end of the Chapter), except for  
30 one thing: they were not permitted to engage in administering sacred rites in the temple, because everyone who did not descend from Aaron

15. The primary opponents would have been the orthodox Calvinists (Counter-Remonstrants) who maintained the independence of the spiritual authority (see Renier 1944, I, 45). But as Wernham notes, this was also the position of the Roman Catholic Church. He suggests that Spinoza may have felt it unnecessary to respond to these opponents because he thought Grotius had already done so satisfactorily.

16. Wernham calls attention to Hobbes' use of similar language in DCv xii.

17. Cf. Exod. 28, 29; Lev. 8–10. But in both passages God seems to make the choice, not Moses.

was considered unconsecrated. But this, of course, has no place in a Christian state.

[39] So we can't doubt that now sacred matters—whose administration requires a special moral character, but does not require membership in a particular family, so that the rulers are not excluded from it as  
[III/235] unconsecrated—are subject only to the right of the supreme 'powers. Without their authority or permission no one has the right and 'power to administer these things, to choose their ministers, to determine and stabilize the foundations of the Church and its teaching, to judge concerning morals and acts of piety, to excommunicate someone from or  
5 receive someone into the Church, nor, finally, to provide for the poor.

[40] These things are demonstrated, not only to be true—we've already done that—but also to be most necessary to the preservation of religion itself, and to that of the republic. For everyone knows how  
10 highly the people value the right and authority regarding sacred matters, and how much weight everyone attaches to the utterances of the one who has it. So we can say that the person who has this authority has the most powerful control over their hearts.

[41] Anyone who claims to take this authority away from the supreme 'powers is trying to divide the sovereignty. This will necessarily give  
15 rise to quarrels and disagreements which can never be restrained, as happened before between the Kings and Priests of the Hebrews. Indeed, anyone who wants to take this authority away from the supreme 'powers is trying (as we've already said) to make himself sovereign. [42] For what can the supreme powers decide, if this right is denied to them?  
20 Certainly nothing concerning war and peace, nor any other business, if they are bound to wait for the opinion of someone else, who is to tell them whether what they judge to be advantageous is pious or not. On the contrary, everything will happen according to the decree of that person who has the right of judging and deciding what is pious or impious, sacrilegious or not.

[43] Every age has seen examples of this. I'll discuss only one, which  
25 is a paradigm for all.<sup>18</sup> Because this right was conceded unconditionally to the Roman Pontiff, after a while he gradually began to get all the Kings in his 'power, until he rose to the peak of sovereignty. Afterward the monarchs, and especially the German Emperors, could do nothing to diminish his authority even the slightest bit. On the contrary,  
30 what they did increased it many times. [44] But this thing which no

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18. ALM note that Spinoza is here using a traditional argument which can be found in the Remonstrant author Johannes Uytenbogaert, who used it to show that the power of the Pope could be deduced from Counter-Remonstrant theses. See Uytenbogaert 1610, 37ff.

Monarch could do, either with iron or with fire, Ecclesiastics could do just by the might of their pens. From this example we can easily see the force and power of this authority, and see how necessary it is for the supreme 'powers to reserve it for themselves.

[45] But if we want to consider the things noted in the preceding [III/236] Chapter, we'll see that this [right of the supreme 'powers in sacred matters] is also conducive, in no small measure, to the increase of religion and piety. For we've seen above that though the Prophets themselves were endowed with a divine virtue, still, because they were private men, the freedom they showed in warning, chiding and reproaching people aggravated them more than it corrected them. On the other hand, when the Kings warned or criticized the people, they were easily turned in a different direction. And again, we've seen that kings—and with them, almost the whole people—often turned away from religion merely because this right did not belong to them unconditionally. It's well-known that for the same reason this happened quite often even in Christian states.

10 [46] But here perhaps someone will ask me: "Who, then, will there be to defend piety with right when those who have sovereignty are willing to be impious? Are those same people even then to be considered its interpreters?" In reply I ask him: "What if the Ecclesiastics—who are also men and private persons, responsible only for taking care of their own affairs—or the others whom he wants to have the right concerning  
15 sacred matters—are willing to be impious? Are they even then to be considered its interpreters?"

[47] Indeed, it's certain that if those who have sovereignty want to follow their own interests, everything will deteriorate, sacred affairs and secular ones, whether the authorities have control over sacred matters or not. But this will happen far more quickly if private men are prepared to defend divine right seditiously. [48] So absolutely nothing is  
20 gained by denying this right to the supreme 'powers; on the contrary, it only makes matters worse. For denying them this right makes them necessarily impious (as were the Kings of the Hebrews to whom this right was not absolutely permitted). A harm and evil to the whole Republic, which would have been uncertain and contingent, becomes certain and necessary.

25 [49] Therefore, whether we consider the truth of the matter, or the security of the state, or the increase of piety, we're forced to maintain that even divine right, *or* the right concerning sacred matters, depends absolutely on the decree of the supreme 'powers, and that they are its interpreters and defenders. From this it follows that those people  
30 are ministers of the word of God who teach the people piety by the

authority of the supreme 'powers, as it's been accommodated, by their decree, to the public advantage.

[50] What remains now is to indicate the reason why there's always been a dispute about this right in Christian states, although, so far as I know, the Hebrews never quarreled about it. Certainly it could seem very unnatural that there's always been a question about something so  
[III/237] evident and necessary, and that the supreme 'powers never had this right without controversy, indeed, never had it without great danger of rebellions and harm to religion. [51] Undoubtedly, if we could not assign any definite cause for this, I might be easily persuaded that everything  
5 I have shown in this Chapter is only theoretical, *or*, an example of that kind of speculation which could never have any use.

But anyone who considers the origins of the Christian religion will find the cause of this completely clear. [52] It was not kings who first taught the Christian religion, but private men who were accustomed for a long time—against the will of those who had sovereignty and  
10 whose subjects they were—to address meetings in private Churches, to establish and administer sacred offices, to manage everything by themselves, and to make decrees without any concern for the sovereign.

[53] Moreover, when religion began to be introduced into the state, after many years had passed, it was Ecclesiastics who had to teach the  
15 Emperors this religion, as they had defined it. That's why they were easily able to succeed in being recognized as its teachers and interpreters—and moreover, as the pastors of the Church, and as it were, the deputies of God. And the Ecclesiastics looked out very well for their own interests by prohibiting marriage to the supreme ministers of the Church and the supreme interpreter of religion, so that afterward Christian Kings would not be able to take this authority for themselves.<sup>19</sup>

20 [54] Furthermore, they had increased the doctrines of Religion to such a great number, and confused them so much with Philosophy, that the supreme interpreter of Religion had to be a supreme Philosopher and Theologian, and had to have time for a great many useless speculations, which can fall to the lot only of private men who have abundant leisure.<sup>20</sup>

25 [55] But among the Hebrews the situation was very different. For their Church began at the same time their state did, and Moses, who had the rule absolutely, taught the people religion, ordained sacred ministries, and chose the ministers for them [cf. xix, 36]. That's why royal authority was valued so highly among the people, and why the

19. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan* xii, 32; xlv, 33–34; xlvii, 10.

20. Cf. the criticism of mixing philosophy and religion at the end of Ch. xi (§§21–24).



30 Kings had such a great right concerning sacred matters. [56] For though no one after Moses' death had absolute sovereignty, still the ruler (as we've already shown)<sup>21</sup> had the right to make decrees both about sacred matters and about all others. From then on, to be taught religion and piety, the people were no more bound to go to the Priest than to the supreme Judge. (See Deuteronomy 17:9, 11.)

[III/238] [57] Finally, though the Kings did not have a right equal to that of Moses, still almost the whole system and selection of the sacred ministry depended on their decision. For David organized the whole process of building the Temple (see 1 Chronicles 28:11–12 etc.), and then chose from all the Levites 24,000 to have charge of the temple services, and  
5 6,000 from whom Judges and officers were chosen, 4,000 gatekeepers, and finally, 4,000 to play on instruments. (See 1 Chronicles 23:4–5.) [58] Next he divided them into units (whose leaders he also chose) so that each unit would perform its functions in its own time, taking turns with the others. (See 1 Chronicles 23:6.) Similarly he divided the  
10 priests into as many units.

[59] But so that I don't have to recount all these things separately, I refer the reader to 2 Chronicles 8:13, where it is said that *the worship of God, as Moses had established it, was administered in the temple according to Solomon's command*, and in v. 14, *that he* (Solomon) *established units*  
15 *of priests for his ministries, and of Levites, etc., according to the command of the man of God, David.* And finally, in v. 15 the Historian testifies *that they did not depart from the command imposed by the King on the priests and Levites in any respect, not even in administering the treasures.* From all this, and from the other histories of the Kings, it follows with utmost clarity that the whole practice of religion and the whole sacred ministry  
20 depended entirely on the King's command.

[60] But when I said above that the Kings did not have, as Moses did, the right to choose the high priest, or to consult God directly, or to condemn the Prophets who prophesied to them during their lifetime, I said this only because the Prophets had the authority to choose a new  
25 King, and forgive regicide, but not because they were permitted to call the King to judgment, or had a legal right to act against him, if he dared to do something against the laws.<sup>22\*\*</sup> [61] So, if there had been no Prophets who, by a special revelation, could safely grant forgiveness for regicide, they would have had a complete right over absolutely all

21. Presumably the reference is to xvii, 37–61 (though it's not clear that the history recounted there supports as extensive an authority for political leaders as Spinoza wishes to argue for in this chapter).

22. \*\*[ADN. XXXIX] Here you should attend especially to what we have said about right in Ch. 16.

matters, both sacred and civil. [62] Hence, today's supreme 'powers, who  
 30 have no Prophets and are not bound by law to accept any (for they  
 are not subject to the laws of the Hebrews), have this right absolutely,  
 even if they are not celibate; and they will always retain it, provided  
 only that they do not allow the doctrines of Religion to be increased  
 to a great number or to be confused with the sciences.

[III/239]

## CHAPTER XX

*It is shown that in a Free Republic  
 everyone is permitted  
 to think what he wishes and to say what he thinks<sup>1</sup>*

[1] If it were as easy to command men's minds as it is their tongues,<sup>2</sup>  
 5 every ruler would govern in safety and no rule would be violent.  
 Everyone would live according to the mentality of the rulers; only in  
 accordance with their decree would people judge what is true or false,  
 good or evil, right or wrong. [2] But as we noted at the beginning of  
 Chapter 17 [xvii, 2], it can't happen that a mind should be absolutely  
 10 subject to the control of someone else. Indeed, no one can transfer to  
 another person his natural right, *or* faculty, of reasoning freely, and of  
 judging concerning anything whatever. Nor can anyone be compelled  
 to do this. [3] That's why rule over minds is considered violent, and  
 why the supreme majesty seems to wrong its subjects and to usurp  
 15 their rights whenever it tries to prescribe to everyone what they must  
 embrace as true and reject as false, and, further, by what opinions  
 everyone's mind ought to be moved in its devotion to God. These  
 things are subject to each individual's control. No one can surrender  
 that even if he wants to.

[4] I confess that someone can get prior control of another person's  
 20 judgment in many ways, some of them almost incredible. So though  
 that person does not directly command the other person's judgment,  
 it can still depend so much on what he says that we can rightly say  
 that to that extent it is subject to his control.<sup>3</sup> But whatever ingenuity

1. Another allusion to Tacitus, *Histories* I, i, 4. Cf. III/12, 247.

2. An allusion to Quintus Curtius VIII, v, 5: Alexander "wished, not only to be called, but to be believed to be, the son of Jupiter, as if he could command minds just as he could tongues" (ALM).

3. Cf. TP ii, 11.

has been able to achieve in this matter, it has never reached the point where men do not learn from experience that each person is plentifully supplied with his own faculty of judgment and that men's minds differ  
 25 as much as their palates do.<sup>4</sup> [5] Though Moses had gotten the greatest prior control of the judgment of his people, not by deception, but by a divine virtue, with the result that he was believed to be divine, and to speak and do everything by divine inspiration, still he was not able to escape murmuring and perverse interpretations.<sup>5</sup> Much less are other Monarchs able to do this. If this were conceivable at all, it would be  
 30 in a monarchic state, not in a democratic one, where all the people, or a great many of them, govern as a body. I think the reason for this is evident to everyone.

[III/240] [6] Therefore, however much the supreme 'powers are believed to have a right over all things, and to be the interpreters of right and piety, they'll still never be able to stop men from making their own judgment about everything according to their own mentality, and from having,  
 5 to that extent, this or that affect. It's true, of course, that by right they can consider as enemies anyone who doesn't think absolutely as they do in every matter. But what we're discussing now is not what their right is, but what's advantageous. [7] I grant that by right they can rule with the utmost violence, and condemn citizens to death for the slightest of  
 10 reasons. But everyone will deny that they can do these things without detriment to the judgment of sound reason. Indeed, because they can't do these things without great danger to the whole state, we can also deny that they have the absolute power to do such things. So we can deny also that they can do them with absolute right. For we've shown that the right of the supreme 'powers is determined by their power.

15 [8] If, then, no one can surrender his freedom of judging and thinking what he wishes, but everyone, by the greatest natural right, is master of his own thoughts, it follows that if the supreme 'powers in a republic try to make men say nothing but what they prescribe, no matter how different and contrary their opinions, they will get only  
 20 the most unfortunate result. Not even the wisest know how to keep quiet, not to mention ordinary people. [9] It's a common vice of men to confide their judgments to others, even if secrecy is needed.<sup>6</sup> So a

4. Cf. E I App., II/83/5–9.

5. The Pentateuch repeatedly reports the people as complaining about the hardships of their life in the wilderness. Cf. Exod. 15:22–25, 16:2–3, 17:2; Num. 11:1–6, 16:12–14, 20:2–4, 21:4–5. We may have a reminiscence here of ch. vi of Machiavelli's *Prince*, where Moses is cited as an example of someone who acquired a new principality by his skill (*virtù*).

6. Proietti has noted allusions here to various passages in Terence: *Adelphi* 342, 953; *Eunuchus* 128 (ALM).

government which denies everyone the freedom to say and teach what he thinks will be most violent. But when a government grants everyone this freedom, its rule will be moderate.

25 [10] Still, we can't deny that majesty can be harmed by words as well as deeds. So if it's impossible to take this freedom away from subjects completely, it's also disastrous to grant it completely. Our task here, then, is to inquire how far this freedom can and must be granted to each person consistently with the peace of the republic and the right  
30 of the supreme 'powers. As I noted at the beginning of Chapter 16, pursuing this inquiry is my main purpose in these final chapters.

[11] From the foundations of the Republic explained above it follows most clearly that its ultimate end is not to dominate, restraining men by fear, and making them subject to another's control, but on the  
[III/241] contrary to free each person from fear, so that he can live securely, as far as possible, i.e., so that he retains to the utmost his natural right to exist and operate without harm to himself or anyone else.

[12] The end of the Republic, I say, is not to change men from rational beings into beasts or automata, but to enable their minds and  
5 bodies to perform their functions safely, to enable them to use their reason freely, and not to clash with one another in hatred, anger or deception, or deal inequitably with one another. So the end of the Republic is really freedom.<sup>7</sup>

[13] Next, we saw [xvi, 37–38] that to form a Republic this one thing was necessary: that either everyone, or some people, or one  
10 person, possessed the whole 'power of making decrees. For since the free judgment of men varies a lot, and everyone thinks he alone knows everything, and it can't happen that they all think alike and speak with one voice, people could not live peaceably together unless each one has surrendered his right to act solely according to the decision of his  
15 own mind.

[14] Each person, then, surrenders only his right to act according to his own decision, but not his right to reason and judge. So no one can act contrary to the decree of the supreme 'powers without infringing on their right. But anyone can think, and judge, and consequently also speak, without infringing on their right, provided just that he only speaks

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7. ALM note that though Spinoza is highly critical of More elsewhere (TP i, 1), here his thought is reminiscent of *Utopia*: "The establishment of this republic has one aim above all: that as far as public needs allow, all citizens should be granted as much time as possible from the service of the body to the freedom and cultivation of the mind" (More 1995, 134). Prima facie this conflicts with iii, 20, which makes "the end of the whole social order and of the state . . . to live securely and conveniently." For the TP, see the annotation at i, 6.

or teaches, and defends his view by reason alone, not with deception,  
 20 anger, hatred, or an intention to introduce something into the republic  
 on the authority of his own decision.

[15] For example, if someone shows that a law is contrary to sound  
 reason, and therefore thinks it ought to be repealed, if at the same  
 time he submits his opinion to the judgment of the supreme 'power (to  
 whom alone it belongs to make and repeal laws), and in the meantime  
 25 does nothing contrary to what that law prescribes, he truly deserves  
 well of the republic, as one of its best citizens. But if he does this to  
 accuse the magistrate of inequity, and make him hateful to the common  
 people, or if he wants to nullify the law, seditiously, against the will of  
 the magistrate, he's just a troublemaker and a rebel.

[16] We see, then, how everyone can say and teach what he thinks,  
 30 without detriment to the right and authority of the supreme 'powers,  
 i.e., without detriment to the Republic's peace: viz. if he leaves to them  
 the decision about what's to be done, and does nothing contrary to  
 their decree (even if he must often act contrary to what he judges—and  
 openly says—is good). He can do this without harm to justice and piety.  
 Indeed, he must do this if he wants to show himself to be just and pious.

[III/242] [17] As we've already shown,<sup>8</sup> justice depends only on the decree of  
 the supreme 'powers. So no one can be just unless he lives according  
 to the decrees received from them. But by what we've shown in the  
 preceding Chapter,<sup>9</sup> the height of piety is what's done with regard to  
 5 the peace and tranquillity of the Republic. That can't be preserved if  
 each person is allowed to live according to the decision of his own mind.  
 So it's also impious to do something from your own decision contrary  
 to the decree of the supreme 'power to whom you're a subject. If this  
 were permitted to everyone, it would necessarily lead to the downfall  
 10 of the state. [18] But really, a subject can't do anything contrary to the  
 decree and dictate of his own reason so long as he acts according to  
 the supreme 'power's decrees. It was at the urging of reason itself that  
 he decided, without reservation, to transfer to the supreme 'power his  
 right of living according to his own judgment.

[19] We can also confirm this conclusion by considering practice.  
 15 For in councils, both of the supreme 'powers and of lesser 'powers, it's  
 rare for anything to be done by the common vote of all the members;  
 nevertheless everything is done according to the common decision of  
 all, both of those who voted for it and of those who voted against.

8. Akkerman suggests that the reference is to xvi, 2–6, and xix, 7–8. Perhaps we  
 should add xvi, 42.

9. Cf. xix, 22–24 (A).

[20] But I return to my subject. From the foundations of the republic  
 20 we've seen how each person can use his freedom of Judgment without  
 detriment to the right of the supreme 'powers. From those same found-  
 ations we can determine no less easily which opinions are seditious in  
 a Republic: viz. those which, as soon as they are assumed, destroy the  
 agreement by which each person surrendered his right to act according  
 to his own decision.

[21] For example, if someone thinks that the supreme 'power isn't  
 25 its own master, or that no one ought to keep his promises, or that each  
 person ought to live according to his own decision, or something else  
 of this kind, directly contrary to the agreement mentioned above, he  
 is seditious. This isn't so much because of the judgment and opinion  
 as because of the action such judgments involve. For by the very fact  
 30 that he thinks such a thing, he cancels the assurance he's given, either  
 tacitly or explicitly, to the supreme 'power.

Other opinions, which don't involve an act such as breaking the con-  
 tract, taking vengeance, venting one's anger, etc., aren't seditious—except  
 perhaps in a Republic somehow corrupted, e.g., where superstitious  
 and ambitious men, who can't endure people who think in a manner  
 worthy of a free man, achieve such a great reputation that ordinary  
 people value their authority more than that of the supreme 'powers.

[III/243] [22] Still, we don't deny that there are some opinions, apparently  
 concerned only with truth and falsity, which are nevertheless stated and  
 spread abroad in an unjust spirit.<sup>10</sup> We've already set limits to these in  
 Chapter 15, in such a way that reason still remains free.

5 [23] Finally, if we attend also to the fact that the loyalty of each  
 person to the Republic, like his loyalty toward God, can be known only  
 from his works, from his loving-kindness toward his neighbor, we'll have  
 no doubt at all that the best republic concedes to everyone the same  
 freedom to philosophize as we've shown that faith does.

10 [24] I confess, of course, that sometimes such freedom has its disadvan-  
 tages. But what was ever so wisely instituted that nothing inconvenient  
 could come from it? Anyone who wants to limit everything by laws  
 will provoke more vices than he'll correct.<sup>11</sup> What can't be prohibited  
 must be granted, even if it often leads to harm. [25] How many evils  
 15 come from extravagant living, envy, greed, drunkenness, and the like?  
 Still, we endure these things, because the laws' command can't prohibit  
 them, even though they're really vices. How much the more must we

10. Probably these opinions would include those which affirm the superiority of  
 revelation to reason (cf. xv, 5ff.). These might be taken to imply that religious authority  
 has precedence over secular, showing clerical resentment of political authority.

11. An allusion to Ovid, *Amores* III, iv, 11. The theme will recur in TP x, 5 (ALM).

grant freedom of judgment, which not only can't be suppressed, but is undoubtedly a virtue. [26] Moreover, as I'll show at once, it doesn't  
 20 lead to any disadvantages which can't be avoided by the magistrates' authority—not to mention the fact that this freedom is especially necessary for advancing the arts and sciences. Only those who have a free and unprejudiced judgment can cultivate these disciplines successfully.  
 25 [27] But suppose this freedom could be suppressed, and men so kept in check that they didn't dare to mutter anything<sup>12</sup> except what the supreme 'powers prescribe. This would surely never happen in such a way that they didn't even think anything except what the supreme 'powers wanted them to. So the necessary consequence would be that every day men would think one thing and say something else. The  
 30 result? The good faith especially necessary in a Republic would be corrupted. Abominable flattery and treachery would be encouraged, as would deceptions and the corruption of all liberal studies.

[28] But it simply couldn't happen that everyone spoke within prescribed limits. On the contrary, the more the authorities try to take away this freedom of speech, the more stubbornly men will resist. Not the greedy, of course, or the flatterers, or the rest of the weak-minded,  
 [III/244] whose supreme well-being consists in contemplating the money in their coffers<sup>13</sup> and having bloated bellies. Resistance will come instead from those whom a good education, integrity of character, and virtue have made more free.

[29] For the most part men are so constituted that they endure  
 5 nothing with greater impatience than that opinions they believe to be true should be considered criminal and that what moves them to piety toward God and men should be counted as wickedness in them. The result is that they dare to denounce the laws and do what they can against the magistrate; they don't think it shameful, but quite honorable, to initiate rebellions and attempt any crime for the sake of this cause.

10 [30] From what we've just established about the dispositions of human nature, it follows that laws made concerning opinions aren't concerned with the wicked, but with people who act like free men, that they aren't made to restrain the malicious, but to aggravate honest men, and that they can't be defended without great danger to the state.

[31] Moreover, such laws are completely useless. The people who  
 15 believe that the opinions the laws condemn are sound will not be able

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12. An allusion to Terence's *Andria* 505, where the words are those of a slave to a master who suspects him of deception. Other allusions to Terence in this passage occur at 243/33 (*præfinito loqui*, from *Hecyra* 94) and 244/3 (*humanam naturam sic comparatam esse* from *Heautontimorumenos* 503) (ALM).

13. Here the allusion is to Horace's *Satires* 1.1, 67.



to obey them. But the people who think the condemned opinions false will accept the laws as privileges, and triumph in them so much that afterward the magistrate won't be able to repeal them even if he wants to.

[32] To these considerations we add what we deduced from the history of the Hebrews, in Chapter 18, under the second heading [§§13–14].

20 Finally, how many schisms in the Church have been produced by the magistrate's willingness to use laws to settle controversies among the learned? If men were not possessed by the hope of getting the laws and the magistrate on their side, of triumphing over their opponents through the general applause of the mob, and of acquiring honors, 25 they'd never contend so unfairly. Their minds would not be excited by such a great frenzy.

[33] It's not only reason which teaches these lessons; so does experience, with daily examples. Laws of this kind, which command what everyone is to believe, and prohibit people from speaking or writing something contrary to this or that opinion, have often been instituted 30 to make a concession to—or rather to surrender to—the anger of those who can't endure free minds and who can, by a certain grim authority, easily change the devotion of a seditious mob to madness, and rouse it against whomever they wish to.

[34] How much better it would be to restrain the anger and frenzy of the mob than to pass useless laws, which can be violated only by those who love the virtues and the arts, and to reduce the Republic to [III/245] such narrowness that it can't endure men who act like free men? [35] What greater evil can be imagined for the Republic than that honest men should be exiled as wicked because they hold different opinions and don't know how to pretend to be what they're not? What, I ask, can be more ruinous than that men should be considered enemies 5 and condemned to death, not because of any wickedness or crime, but because they have a mind worthy of a free man? Or that the scaffold, the scourge of the evil, should become the noblest stage for displaying the utmost endurance and a model of virtue, to the conspicuous shame of the majesty?<sup>14</sup> [36] For people who know themselves to be 10 honorable don't, like criminals, fear death or plead to be excused from punishment; they're not tormented by repentance for a shameful deed; on the contrary, they think it honorable, not a punishment, to die for

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14. Spinoza uses the term *catasta* ("scaffold") only in this passage. I presume he means to refer to any place of execution, and has in mind such examples of heroic resistance as Don Lope de Vera y Alarcon (also known as Judah, the faithful), burned at the stake by the Inquisition in 1644, and celebrated in Menasseh ben Israel's *Hope of Israel* (a book Spinoza owned). For further detail, see the annotation to Spinoza's reply to Albert Burgh, Letter 76, IV/322.

a good cause, and glorious to die for freedom. What kind of precedent is established by the death of such men, whose cause those lacking in spirit and weak-minded know nothing about, whose cause the seditious  
 15 hate,<sup>15</sup> whose cause the honorable love? No one can take any example from this death, except to imitate it, or else to be a flatterer.

[37] So if good faith, not flattering lip service, is to be valued, if the supreme 'powers are to retain their sovereignty as fully as possible, and not be compelled to yield to the rebellious, freedom of judgment must  
 20 be granted. Men must be so governed that they can openly hold different and contrary opinions, and still live in harmony. There can be no doubt that this way of governing is best, and has the least disadvantages, since it's the one most compatible with men's nature. [38] For we've shown that in a democratic state (which comes closest to the natural  
 25 condition) everyone contracts to act according to the common decision, but not to judge and reason according to the common decision. Because not all men can equally think the same things, they agreed that the measure which had the most votes would have the force of a decree, but that meanwhile they'd retain the authority to repeal these decrees when they saw better ones. The less we grant men this freedom  
 30 of judgment, the more we depart from the most natural condition, and the more violent the government.

[39] The next thing to establish is that this freedom has no disadvantages which can't be avoided just by the authority of the supreme 'power, and that the only easy way to restrain men from harming one another, even though they openly hold contrary opinions, is by this authority.

Examples are readily available; I don't need to look far to find them.

[III/246] [40] Consider the city of Amsterdam, which, from its great growth and the admiration of all nations, knows by experience the fruits of this liberty.<sup>16</sup> In this most flourishing Republic, this most outstanding

15. Bennett was understandably puzzled by this. Why would rebels hate men willing to die for their beliefs? I think the seditious here are religious leaders who "can't endure free minds" (above §33) and therefore pressure the civil authorities to take repressive measures which, left to their own concerns, those authorities would not be disposed to take. Spinoza assumes the civil authorities will normally allow greater liberty than the religious leaders would. He would no doubt have cited the history of the Remonstrant controversy as evidence for this view. Cf. xix, 1, above, and xx, 41, below, along with the annotation given in those passages. See also Letter 30, IV/166/27–29, and the critique of the clergy in the Preface to the TTP, §§15–19. He regards the preachers as seditious because they deny the civil authorities rights which are essential to their sovereignty.

16. In his *Lettres philosophiques*, Voltaire will write similarly about London (6th Letter). In a letter to Mme. de Bernières, he has parallel remarks about Amsterdam and The Hague (7 October 1722). Meinsma thought that we should take Spinoza's praise of Amsterdam here as devilishly ironic (Meinsma 1983, 375). Recent commentators have generally disagreed, sometimes citing the testimony of contemporary observers to the exceptional freedom of the Dutch Republic. (Cf. Gebhardt V, 115; ALM; Gebhardt/Gawlick; Totaro;

city, all men, no matter what their nation or sect, live in the greatest  
 5 harmony. When they entrust their goods to someone, the only thing  
 they care to know is whether the person is rich or poor, and whether  
 he usually acts in good faith or not. They don't care at all what his  
 Religion or sect is, for that would do nothing to justify or discredit  
 their case before a judge. Provided they harm no one, give each person  
 10 his due, and live honestly, there is absolutely no sect so hated that its  
 followers are not protected by the public authority of the magistrates  
 and their forces.

[41] But before, when the religious controversy between the Remonstrants and the Counter-Remonstrants<sup>17</sup> was being stirred up by the Politicians and the Estates of the provinces, in the end it degenerated into a schism, and many examples made it manifest that laws passed to settle  
 15 Religious controversies aggravate people more than they correct them, that some people take unlimited license from them, and moreover, that schisms don't come from a great zeal for truth (a source of gentleness and consideration for others), but from an overwhelming desire for control.<sup>18</sup>

[42] These examples show, more clearly than by the noon light, that  
 20 the real schismatics are those who condemn the writings of others and seditiously incite the unruly mob against the writers, not the writers themselves, who for the most part write only for the learned and call only reason to their aid. Again, the real troublemakers are those who want, in a free Republic, to take away freedom of judgment, even  
 25 though it can't be suppressed.

[43] With this we've shown:

(1) that it's impossible to take away from people the freedom to say what they think;

(2) that this freedom can be granted to everyone, without detriment to  
 the right and authority of the supreme 'powers, and that everyone can  
 30 keep it, without detriment to that right, provided he takes no license

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Bartuschat 2012.) No doubt Meinsma went too far in his criticism of Amsterdam when he claimed that in no other city in the republic was it so dangerous to express dissent. But Spinoza also goes too far when he claims that all men in Amsterdam live in the greatest harmony. §40 reflects Spinoza's hopes for Amsterdam, not a realistic assessment of the situation there in his day, as the persecution of Adriaan Koerbagh illustrates.

17. For the history of this controversy see Israel 1995, chs. 18–20.

18. In 1619 the Synod of Dordrecht (Dort) deprived about two hundred Remonstrant preachers of their livings and right to preach. Some were rehabilitated when they complied with a formula of submission. Others were permanently stripped of their pulpits but allowed to live as private citizens, provided they didn't preach or engage in theological disputes. The rest were banished, on pain of imprisonment if they sought to evade their expulsion. Maybe this doesn't, compared with the practices of the Inquisition, count as "unlimited license," but it does suggest a strong desire for control.

from that to introduce anything into the Republic as a right, or to do anything contrary to the accepted laws;

(3) that everyone can have this same freedom, and the peace of the Republic still be preserved, and that no disadvantages come from this which can't easily be limited;

(4) that everyone can have this freedom without detriment to piety; and

(5) that laws made about speculative matters are completely useless.

[III/247] [44] Finally, we've shown

(6) not only that this freedom *can* be granted without detriment to the peace of the Republic, and to the piety and right of the supreme 'powers, but that it *must* be granted, if we are to preserve all these things.

Where people try to take this freedom away from men, and bring  
5 to judgment the opinions of those who disagree with them—but not their hearts, which alone can sin—they make examples of honest men, who seem rather to be martyrs. They aggravate the others more than they terrify them, and move them to compassion, if not to vengeance.

[45] Again, liberal studies and trust are corrupted, flatterers and traitors are encouraged, and the opponents [of liberal studies and trust]  
10 exult, because a concession has been made to their anger, and because they've made those who have sovereignty followers of the doctrine whose interpreters they are thought to be. That's how it happens that they dare to usurp their authority and right, and don't blush to boast that they've been chosen immediately by God, and that their own decrees are divine, whereas those of the supreme 'powers are human, and  
15 therefore should yield to divine decrees, that is, to their own decrees. No one can fail to see that all these things are completely contrary to the well-being of the Republic.

[46] So here, as above (in Ch. 18), we conclude that nothing is safer for the republic than that piety and Religion should include only the practice of Loving-kindness and Equity, and that the right of the  
20 supreme 'powers concerning both sacred and secular matters should relate only to actions. For the rest, everyone should be granted the right to think what he wants and to say what he thinks.

[47] With this I've finished the matters I had decided to discuss in this Treatise. It remains only to note explicitly that I've written nothing here which I do not most willingly submit to the examination and  
25 judgment of the supreme 'Powers of my Country. For if they judge that anything I've said is incompatible with the laws of the country

or contrary to the general welfare, I wish it unsaid. I know that I'm a man, and may have erred. But I've taken great pains not to err, and especially to write nothing which wouldn't be completely consistent with the laws of my country, with piety and with morals.